

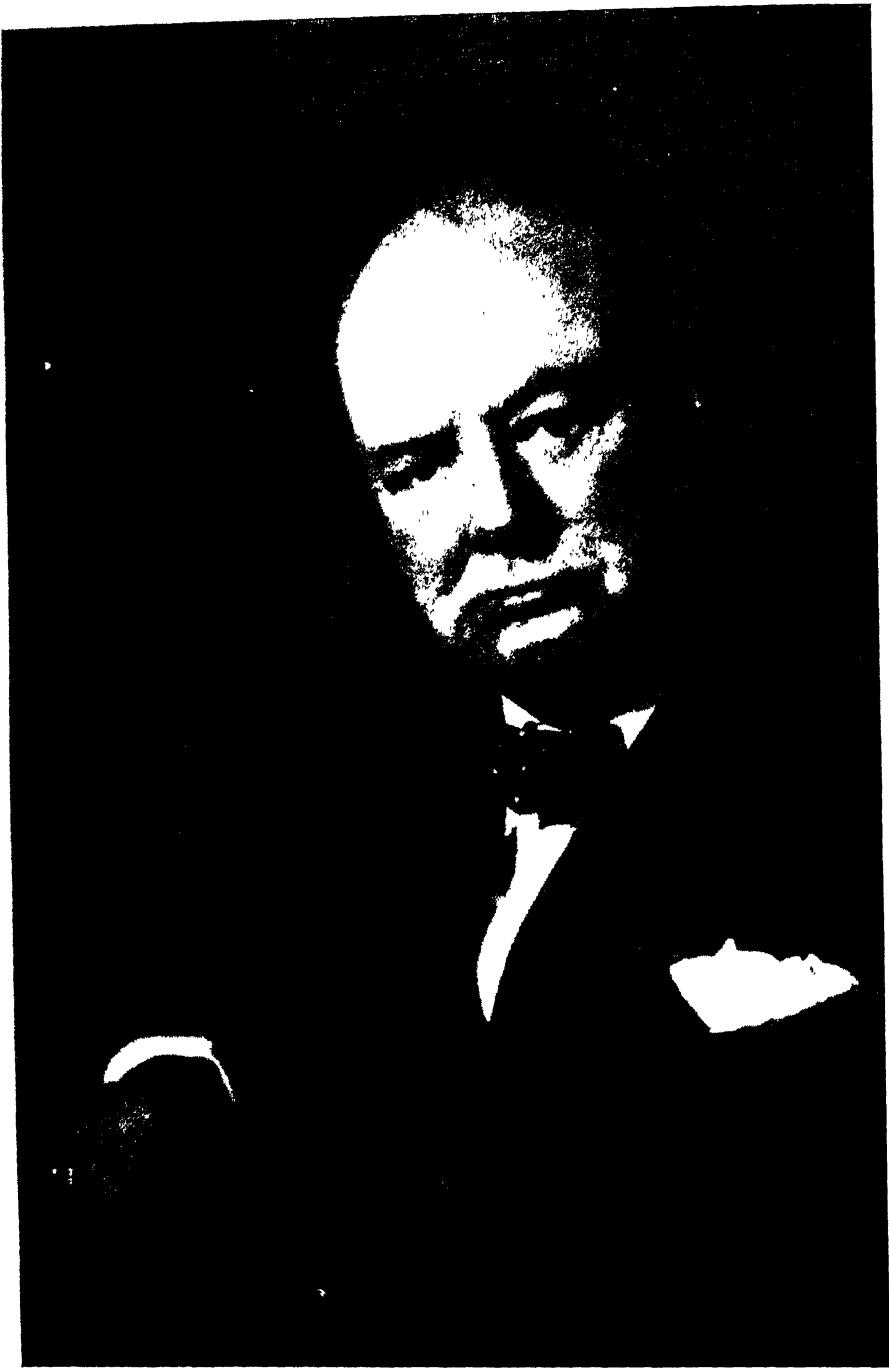


# ECHOES of BIG BEN

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WINSTON SPENCER CHURCHILL

*(Russell & Sons)*

# ECHOES of BIG BEN

*A Journalist's Parliamentary Diary*

(1881-1940)

By

SIR ALEXANDER MACKINTOSH

*CHECKED - JAS*

*With a Frontispiece*



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I AM GREATLY INDEBTED TO TWO JOURNALIST FRIENDS, MR. JOHN Carvel and Mr. Harry Shaw, for their encouragement and advice in the preparation of this book.

A. M.



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## INTRODUCTION

I LOOK BACK SIXTY YEARS IN MY PARLIAMENTARY RECOLLECTIONS. NO ONE NOW IN the House of Commons had become a member till long after I entered the Press Gallery in January, 1881. Nine years passed before Lloyd George,\* the Father of the House, captured the seat which he has held for over half a century. For fifty-eight years I was a constant occupant of the Gallery, in which I set foot when it was opened to the Provincial and Scottish Press, and for nearly the whole of that period I had the entrée to the Members' Lobby. I watched two generations passing through the Lobby, and even since, at the age of eighty, I gave up my every-day attendance in 1938 I have visited the House frequently. I went to the Gallery once or twice a week after my retirement till near the end of 1940.

How could I have endured life at Westminster so long, members of Parliament asked me in my old age when they saw me in the Lobby? The reason, I suppose, is that my interest in Parliament was never quenched and seldom flagged. Whether it was engaged in a great game, as Victorian cynics said, or in vital struggles on policy and ideals, it kept me young and unwearied in spirit.

I share the feeling expressed by Wilberforce when told by Harriet Macaulay that her brother had been offered a seat in the House of Commons: "Ah! I hear that shout again—'Hear! Hear!' What a life it was!"

The House in which that shout still resounds has been transformed in its social and political texture. It has ceased to be a pastime resort of the leisured. The dominance of the squirearchy and aristocracy has been broken by the middle class, the business man and the manual worker. The Irish Nationalists who were formerly so conspicuous have gone; the alternation of Liberal and Conservative Governments is no longer the settled order of Parliamentary life; the Labour Party has attained a position in the State undreamt of sixty years ago; and equally unforeseen are women in the House—not to mention on the Treasury bench.

But although the House has changed in these respects and looks different from what it was when members wore their tall hats, it is essentially the same. I have been impressed not so much by what has changed as by what has endured. There is the same atmosphere; the spirit and the symbols are the same. The unwritten rule holds sway in one generation after another; traditions born in the struggle for civil liberty survive; archaic practices endure because of their historic significance.

"The House of Commons," says Ormsby in *Sybil*, "is not the House of Commons of my time." The same mournful reflection has been made by the Ormsbys of successive generations. I have heard it from ex-members in the present day. But in its collective character, whatever the Ormsbys may say, the House is always the same.

Even the typical figures are familiar. Joseph Chamberlain described them sixty years ago. "In my time," he said, "I have never known the House of Commons without a funny man. Then there is the House of Commons bore—of course, there is more than one, but there is always one par excellence; he is generally a man

\* Created Earl Lloyd-George of Dwyfor, January, 1945, died March, 1945.

who is very clever, a man of encyclopædic information which he has been unable to digest himself and which, therefore, he is always ready to impart to everybody else. Then you have the weighty man, and the gravity of the weighty man of the House of Commons is a thing to which there is no parallel in the world. You have the foolish man, you have the man with one idea, you have the independent man, you have the man who is a little cracked."

I might be charged with breach of privilege if I were to say that any member of the present House was "a little cracked." Certainly the other figures could have been identified by Joseph Chamberlain's sons.

Through all vicissitudes the House of Commons has jealously asserted its authority. This has been strengthened by the abolition of the veto of the Peers and the enlargement of the Electorate. At various periods I have heard the complaint that the House has become a mere registering machine. It is true that the Government has acquired greater control over Parliamentary procedure and entrusts increased powers to Whitehall, whereby "the New Despotism" is exercised. It is also true that a strong Prime Minister may, for a time, dominate the House of Commons. But the House is never disregarded with impunity. It does not allow Ministers to forget that it is the master. They submit to it or fall.

It is, I think, fortunate for the credit and welfare of the country that the rôle of the Member of Parliament is, in spite of the sneer of the superior person, an honoured rôle. Members themselves are conscious of the privilege that they enjoy and the responsibility that they bear. Incidents and scenes in their daily life, from the time that traffic is held up for them on their approach to the Palace of Westminster, foster the sense of their importance. In the House they see the emblems of the authority which they share—the Speaker in the Chair, the mace on the table. I have been often interested in watching them, when the bells sounded, as they tramped along the corridor to a division. Glancing at the stranger who stood aside and dared not pass the door they seemed to say in their pride, "I am an M.P. going to vote. My vote may turn out the Government and change the laws of the country and your destinies." And in their environment are the ghosts of the mighty dead who played great parts on the national stage.



## CHAPTER I

### GREAT VICTORIANS

Gladstone, Disraeli and Bright—Hartington's Yawn—Chamberlain's Monocle—Obstruction—Speaker Brand's “Coup d'état”—Parnell—Kilmarnham “Treaty”—Bradlaugh.

WHEN I LOOKED DOWN WITH AWE FROM THE GALLERY IN JANUARY, 1881, MY EYE travelled instinctively to Gladstone. His Midlothian campaign had been followed by his final victory over Disraeli and now, reluctantly appointed by Queen Victoria for the second time as Prime Minister, he sat supreme on the Treasury bench. I looked with interest also on his colleague and friend, John Bright, the Quaker and “People’s Tribune,” whose fame was almost equal to his own. Bright has been described in an ideal, though short, biography by G. M. Trevelyan as not only the first Nonconformist in a Cabinet but also the first nominee therein of the working man.

Beside the two veterans were the Whig Marquis of Hartington, who led the Liberal party during Gladstone’s temporary retirement in the late ’seventies, and Joseph Chamberlain, the Radical, with monocle and orchid. On the other side of the table were Stafford Northcote, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in Disraeli’s last Government and now the leader of the Opposition; Hicks Beach, W. H. Smith, Richard Cross, and Disraeli’s friend, handsome Lord John Manners (afterwards Duke of Rutland), himself a fine type of the patrician who was long twitted with his youthful lines:

“Let wealth and commerce, laws and learning die,  
But leave us still our old nobility.”

Below the Opposition gangway were the dynamic Charles Stewart Parnell and Randolph Churchill, and the languid figure of Arthur Balfour, whose strength was not yet revealed.

I heard Disraeli’s last important speech in the House of Lords. It was delivered late at night in March, 1881, a few weeks before his death. Lord Beaconsfield was ill and swallowed one drug and inhaled another, sufficient in quantities for his speech. The impulsive pallid face of this strange man of genius, with the curl on the centre of the forehead, haunts my memory. Peeresses declared that they saw hair-pins fastening the curl.

Proud Peers of long descent listened to Disraeli as to an oracle. His speech on the giving up of Candahar to Afghanistan was argumentative and not one of his most sparkling displays, but there were in it traces of his wit and personal gibes which fluttered the Peers. It was memorable for the phrase—“the key of India is London.” The authorship of the phrase was claimed by Prince Lobanoff, the Russian Ambassador, but it was truly Disraelian, and it has been for ever credited to the orator from whose lips I heard it.

I heard all Gladstone's speeches in the House of Commons for thirteen crowded years.

Gladstone was not merely the greatest Parliamentarian but the greatest man I have known. When his long life ended Lord Salisbury, his principal opponent since Disraeli's death, bore testimony to his transcendent intellect and his great ideals and moral aspirations. Scarcely any political leader aroused such passionate enthusiasm and adoration. No leader excited greater animosity and yet in hot controversy opponents paid him personal respect.

It was an honour for any member to have a word with Gladstone. I do not recollect to have seen him, except on one occasion, chatting in the Lobby. He took scarcely any share in the social life of the House; I have been told that he never dined there until he was over eighty. Members were thrilled when the great man entered the smoking room, on his only visit there, to test thought readings by Stuart Cumberland. Tim Healy, the scathing assailant of the Liberal Government's old-time Irish policy, jumped up and gave him a chair.

In the double role of orator and debater Gladstone was unique. John Bright equalled him—perhaps surpassed him—in oratory; Joseph Chamberlain was his equal in the cut and thrust of debate. But no one combined these qualities so effectively or possessed in such a pre-eminent degree all the arts and artifices of Parliament.

From the reports of his speeches you can have no idea of their effect on his audience. That was due to his personality as well as to his words and their delivery. He mesmerized the House to such an extent that on notable occasions opponents of his policy who had prepared an attack allowed the opportunity for it to slip.

Men quailed before his terrible eye. I remember two occasions when a speaker confronted by it sat down suddenly in silence. One was the case of an indiscreet friend in the House; the other was the case of a Free Church minister on his platform in Scotland who inadvisedly introduced the subject of disestablishment.

Intense earnestness, moral fervour, conviction of the justice of his cause gave fire and force to his speeches. His rich, resonant voice was aided by animated gesture. It is true that he was often prolix. Opponents delighted to quote Disraeli's description of Gladstone as "a sophistical rhetorician, inebriated with the exuberance of his own verbosity." Sometimes his sentences were capable of different interpretations; sometimes he was accused of hair-splitting. Yet he was as effective in the exposition of his policy as he was bold in its conception.

I heard his Budgets in 1881 and 1882 and even when he wandered into by-paths he carried his audience with him. Sustenance in a long effort was provided for him by Mrs. Gladstone, who saw from her corner in the Ladies' Gallery that he had his "pomatum" pot of egg and sherry. Rarely did a member leave the House while he was on his feet, however long he might speak.

He lacked Disraeli's gift of phrase-making. Phrases from his lips became current, but, apart from their context, they were commonplace. Among them I remember "within measurable distance," "holds the field," "the dim and distant future," "the flowing tide is with us." There was one phrase for which generations of politicians on crossing from the Opposition to the Treasury bench have been indebted to Gladstone. When he took office in 1880 he apologized for an expression that he used about Austria, when in "a position of greater freedom and less responsibility."

I see him on the Treasury bench, in old-fashioned frock coat, with wide shirt front and a broad, black tie fastened in a bow under a high collar, wide open at the throat. When baited by an opponent he crouches like a tiger and at the earliest moment jumps up, with eyes blazing and looking as if he might spring across the table. I see him with arms uplifted or sweeping wide, or with finger stretched forth in derision. I see him thumping the brass-bound box on which a later generation has detected the mark of his blows, while his collar mounts to his ears in the manner pictured by the cartoonist. Again I see him at the end of the day dutifully writing his letter to the Queen on a pad on his knee, and occasionally adjusting the stall on the stump of the finger which had been destroyed by a gun accident, or scratching the top of his head with his thumb.

John Bright's oratorical manner differed from Gladstone's. With erectly poised head, framed in white hair, clear-eyed, benignant and yet calmly decisive, his moral qualities reminded me of the Quaker Joshua Geddes in *Redgauntlet*, his latent courage shrouded by a demeanour which led Palmerston to describe him as "the honourable and reverend gentleman." I don't think that Bright raised his voice even when attacking the "rebel" Irish party. He employed scarcely any rhetorical gesture, only lifting his hand a little to emphasize a point. With his clear, musical voice and perfect diction, he delighted the ear. His language was the language of the Bible and Milton, and he had unerring instinct in the cadence of his sentences.

More than once in our time the simile in his famous speech on the Crimean War has been appropriate: "The Angel of Death has been abroad throughout the land; you may almost hear the beating of his wings." Political cabals have continued to be described, as Bright described the Liberal opponents of the Liberal Government's Reform Bill in 1866, retiring into the "Cave of Adullam." I hope present-day members are not so ignorant as their predecessors of the Biblical Cave, where were gathered everyone that was in distress and everyone that was discontented. The amusing story (told by Alfred Dale in the *Times Literary Supplement* many years ago) is that as two members were leaving the House one asked "Where did Bright get that 'Cave' from?" and the other replied "Have you forgotten your Arabian Nights?"

I cannot recall any other parting of statesmen so affectionate and touching as that when Bright left Gladstone's Government in 1882 on account of our intervention in Egypt against Arabi and the bombardment of Alexandria. Bright's resignation speech from the second bench below the gangway on the Ministerial side was brief and sorrowful, and so was Gladstone's reply. The two men, while differing on the application of the moral law to the Egyptian issue, were careful of one another's feelings. Their mutual esteem remained.

The Government of 1880-85 was in reality, though not in name, a coalition government. Liberals of different schools were covered by the "Gladstone Umbrella." The moderates were still predominant, but the admission to the Cabinet of the manufacturer of screws and ex-mayor, "Joe" Chamberlain, was a sign that the old exclusive system of government by the privileged families was breaking down. With Sir Charles Dilke, a living encyclopaedia as a helpful friend, always at hand, Chamberlain pushed on to his Radical goal.

Lord Hartington ("Harty-tarty" in familiar gossip) not only enjoyed the special confidence of the older and more cautious school of Liberals but also was respected by the whole party for his disinterested sense of duty. As he had led the party in Opposition the Queen pressed the Prime Ministership upon him when it triumphed in 1880, and colleagues who dreaded Gladstone desired Hartington to accept the position. He declined it then, as he declined it twice when Salisbury offered to stand aside in his favour. He knew that a Liberal Government was impossible without Gladstone and that Gladstone would not serve under anybody.

The story of his yawn has come down from one generation to another. I witnessed the incident. Hartington, making his Indian Budget statement, put his hand over his mouth, gave a huge yawn, and turning to Porter, the Irish Attorney-General, who was the only occupant of his bench, muttered "this is damned dull." When I told the story in a little book it was challenged by a reviewer, who had read elsewhere that the yawn was invented, but Sir John Horsbrugh-Porter, to whom I wrote, assured me that his father often recalled the incident and was greatly amused by "the humanity of the aside."

King Edward told von Bülow about it, as is recorded in the German's Memoirs. Hartington "yawned over his own tediousness," King Edward said, "but after he had had a huge yawn he went ahead with his speech, without turning a hair."

It was no uncommon sight to see Hartington, especially when he sat on the Opposition front bench, slumbering during the tedious speeches of others. As his head jerked back his hat was in danger of falling off. He was wide awake in every sense when important questions awaited decision; and the country appreciated his calm, deliberate judgment.

Hartington was almost the last of the patrician Whigs. So long as he stood by Gladstone, to whom he was personally attached, the Liberal chief had the co-operation of many of the Whig families. Later they united with their historic Conservative rivals, and the name of Whig passed out of political terminology. As has been said, a Whig was born, not made.

Chamberlain, alert and pugnacious, was a striking contrast to Hartington. *He* never slept or slumbered. He never walked when he could drive. To politics he gave his whole mind. It was a resolute mind. He feared nothing himself but inspired fear in others. I remember when he was President of the Board of Trade he mesmerised or frightened a critical deputation by his searching, menacing monocle.

In my early years at Westminster we kept very late hours. Till 1888 there was no fixed time for the rising of the House of Commons. It was not unusual for the House to sit till 2 or 3 o'clock. Through many a summer night it sat till the City, seen from Westminster, did "like a garment, wear the beauty of the morning." The winding-up speeches in a debate—and long speeches they were—began on normal occasions about 10.30, when members in evening dress were back from dinner. Sometimes the speeches were even later. I remember an occasion when Hartington, as a member of the Liberal Government, spoke after midnight for an hour-and-a-half and Northcote replied at equal length. Members as a rule did not complain of being kept out of bed. "We should have been sitting up somewhere else, had we not been in the House of Commons," said Sir Francis Scrope in the time of *Endymion*.

That was all very well for them, but an extremely heavy strain was for many years placed on the Speaker. However protracted the sitting, he could leave the Chair for only half-an-hour. Business was suspended in his absence. We knew what was meant when his train-bearer about eight o'clock came and whispered to him. The Speaker's "chop" was ready. Sometimes he was compelled to wait for the hasty meal by a bore who went on talking. On his return he remained on duty till the House rose. Nowadays the Chairman of Committee (Deputy Speaker) or the Deputy Chairman takes the Speaker's place when he retires for lunch or tea and dinner.

A generation familiar with the Closure can scarcely realize how helpless the House was when Obstruction was rampant and there was no means of checking it. Obstruction had been practised occasionally in the 'seventies, notably by the "Colonels" in opposing the abolition of Purchase in the Army. It was employed systematically by the Irish Home Rulers, led by Parnell, as a Parliamentary weapon. One of the first members to use it was Joe Biggar, an astute Nationalist who took pleasure in his devices for consuming time.

My first experience of an all-night sitting was at the introduction of the Irish Coercion Bill early in 1881, when the House sat continuously for 41 hours. There has been no other sitting so long. Debate had already spread over three days in the previous week when it was resumed on Monday. The Government was determined to obtain the first reading of the Bill before the House adjourned. The Nationalists were determined to defeat the Government. Several of them could speak for hours.

There is no saying how much longer the sitting, begun on Monday, might have lasted but for the Speaker's *coup d'état*. I went home to bed late on Tuesday night and returned early next morning. At nine o'clock that morning Mr. Speaker Brand (who had received permission meantime to take rest) stopped the debate on his own authority.

A dramatic scene! British members triumphantly cheered the Speaker's arbitrary action. The Irish were extremely mortified and angry. They made their protest in a histrionic manner, which no others could emulate. After the division on the first reading of the Bill they stood up, shouted "Privilege," bowed to the Chair, and marched single file out of the House. Next day on their return they fell back on disorderly tactics. Twenty-eight were suspended *en masse*; they refused to withdraw unless compelled by superior force; most of them yielded to a formal tap on the shoulder by the Serjeant-at-Arms, the others were removed by the messengers of the House.

"We must," Parnell declared, "show these gentlemen (the British) that if they won't do what we want they shall do nothing else." In that defiant spirit he conducted the Parliamentary operations of his party. Meanwhile the Land League under his auspices thwarted the Executive in Ireland.

"The resources of civilisation are not exhausted." That was Gladstone's resounding phrase in the course of the Irish conflict. It was the prelude to Parnell's arrest in the Autumn of 1881 and imprisonment in Kilmainham. But intimidation and outrages increased, and when it became known in the following spring that Parnell was desirous, on certain conditions, of using his influence for Law and Order the so-called "Kilmainham Treaty," in the arrangement of which Joseph Chamberlain took part, resulted in the Irish leader's release.

The fiercest of many denunciations of the Government by the Conservatives was provoked by the Treaty. Arthur Balfour declared in Gladstone's face that it was infamous. In their protests the Conservatives found an ally in William Edward Forster, who had been in the previous decade a nominee for the Liberal leadership and who now, in revolt against the Kilmainham transaction, threw up the office of Chief Secretary for Ireland. "Buckshot" Forster he was called by the Parnellites, because he advocated the use of buckshot in dispersing riotous assemblies.

The bitterest taunt I ever heard from a retired Minister against a former chief was Forster's gibe that Gladstone "could persuade most people of most things and, above all, could persuade himself of almost anything." Forster became so obnoxious to colleagues that the corner seat behind the Government which he claimed after his resignation was often seized by others, and he could obtain possession of it only by the pressure of his tall heavy frame. All classes and parties were stunned by the murder in Phoenix Park of Forster's successor, Lord Frederick Cavendish (who went to Dublin with the hope of removing agrarian discontent), and Burke, the Under-Secretary. Coercion was renewed and the forces of disorder were dealt with courageously by Earl Spencer, the Viceroy, who was bitterly assailed day after day by the Nationalists.

Parnell has remained an enigma after all the histories, memoirs and plays in which he has figured. The rule of the "uncrowned king of Ireland" was more like that of the Dictator of a Totalitarian state than the leader of a British party. As I looked at the impassive, proud, pale face, so handsome in early years and ultimately so haggard, I marvelled at his domination over colleagues from whom, as a landlord who had been at Cambridge, he differed in antecedents and class. His colleagues included a larger proportion than any other party skilled in Parliamentary devices, but he associated with only a few and conferred with them seldom. They were embarrassed by his mysterious disappearances, which later events revealed to be due to his association with Mrs. O'Shea. Yet his ascendancy was till nearly the end unchallenged.

I remember an occasion when his party was engaged in a noisy outburst. He arrived and took his seat near the top of the third bench below the Opposition gangway. Immediately his followers were as silent as school-boys on the appearance of the awe-inspiring headmaster.

Although a great man of action, Parnell lacked the Parliamentary gifts possessed by his lieutenants. He was not an accomplished debater, nor a fluent speaker. He had not Healy's tiger-like qualities, or the oratorical power of Thomas Sexton and A. M. Sullivan, or the political knowledge of Justin McCarthy, nor did he emit such fire as blazed in John Dillon and William O'Brien. But "fire that's closest kept burns most of all." Underlying Parnell's words was fierce passion. I shuddered at his defiances of the Government and Parliament. His language sounded the more menacing on account of its smouldering tone.

A far-off world is recalled by the subjects discussed by the 1880-85 Parliament. Liberals entered it under Gladstone's leadership with high aims and sanguine hopes, but the Government had to deal with unforeseen, embarrassing problems and was dogged by misfortune. The Irish Question pursued it throughout its whole existence, and Imperial matters also caused agitation. On the subject of Russia's approach to India, Lord Salisbury had earlier tried to relieve apprehension by

advising the nervous to "study large maps," but at this period again her excursion towards Central Asia raised the spectre of war. There were frequent hot discussions and votes of censure on the Government policy in Egypt and the Sudan, and feeling against the Ministers was excited to a passionate pitch by the failure to rescue General Gordon at Khartoum, where he had remained in disregard of definite orders. Queen Victoria sent an indignant telegram *en clair* to Gladstone.

The chief legislative achievements of the Government were the Irish Land Act and the Franchise Act. The Corrupt Practices Act, which limited the expense of elections, was another timely reform. Healy's knowledge of the Irish Act, by the way, was said to be equal to Gladstone's. Party passion, inflamed by Chamberlain, ran through the political world in the conflict between the two Houses and the two great parties over the Bill which extended household suffrage to the counties and enfranchised the rural labourer, but moderating influences led to the compromise by which it was accompanied by the redistribution of seats. This was carried out on the general principle of equal electoral districts, each, as a rule, returning a single member.

The House of Commons was at its worst in dealing with Charles Bradlaugh. In its loathing of the propagandist of Atheism, who had incurred additional prejudice by his "Impeachment of the House of Brunswick," it disregarded the constitutional right of an elected member. On this issue Lord Randolph Churchill's Fourth Party first asserted itself, and the lead of the House was taken from Gladstone.

Exciting scenes for several years followed the rejection of Bradlaugh's claim to make an Affirmation, or take the Oath of Allegiance. All means were attempted by him without success to secure a seat. An address to the House that he delivered at the Bar, although he had consummate powers of speech, was of no avail. Bradlaugh was physically a powerful man, and when he tried on one occasion to force his way into the House and was dragged from the Lobby to the courtyard, not only were his own clothes torn in the struggle but the police also had a dishevelled appearance. One could not be sure on looking at them whether the police had been engaged in expelling Bradlaugh or he had tried to expel the police.

I was amazed, after the exclusion order had expired, to see him striding to the table and administering the Oath to himself. He took a Bible from his pocket, read the Oath from a sheet of paper, and then kissed the Book and subscribed the Oath with a stylograph. The House banished the audacious offender. Three times in his contest with Parliament he was re-elected for Northampton, but though Gladstone, while expressing passionate devotion to the Christian doctrines which Bradlaugh assailed, stood by his constitutional right and was in favour of Affirmation, he was kept out of his seat till the Dissolution. In the new Parliament his right prevailed. The Affirmation Act not yet being passed he was allowed to take the Oath without any fuss, the Speaker (now Mr. Peel) refusing to suffer any intervention.

Bradlaugh proved a useful, able, decorous member, and he served on a Royal Commission. As he lay on his death-bed in January, 1891, the House expunged from its Journals the resolution which debarred him from taking the Oath or making an Affirmation. Through that resolution the Clerk of the House struck a red line.

## CHAPTER II

### RIVAL DEMOCRATS

*Lord Randolph Churchill—The Fourth Party—The Radical Agitator—“Unauthorised Programme”—Ransom—Chamberlain’s Break with Gladstone.*

ONE OF THE MOST BRILLIANT FEATS IN PARLIAMENTARY ANNALS WAS PERFORMED BY Lord Randolph Churchill in mastering the Conservative party. There have been imitators of the Fourth Party that he formed, but none has approached it in cleverness or influence. It got its name in a casual way. When someone spoke in Victorian rhetoric of the two great parties in the State, Parnell cried “Three.” “Four,” cried Lord Randolph. The House laughed at this claim for a group of four Conservatives.

I had few dull, idle moments in the Press Gallery when “Randy” was on the warpath. With bold, persistent attacks on the Liberal Ministers, he mingled flouts and jeers at the “old gang” on his own side of the House. The leader of the Opposition, Sir Stafford Northcote, was a statesman of ripe judgment and fine temper. A placid figure, with hands ensconced in the opposite sleeves, he kept diligent watch on the Government. His criticism was well directed, but the more aggressive members of his party thought he was too deferential to Gladstone, whose private secretary he had been at the Board of Trade when the future Liberal leader was in the Peel Ministry.

Liberals were tickled, and docile Conservatives were indignant, when Lord Randolph jeered at the “blameless and respectable gentlemen” on Sir Stafford’s bench, the “bourgeois placemen,” the “possessors of double-barrelled names often associated with mediocrity.” Flippant young men on their own side called them “the Goats,” a name suggested by their beards.

Along with Lord Randolph on the front bench below the Opposition gangway were three remarkable men. His most active associates were Drummond Wolff, an expert on foreign affairs, and Gorst, an astute political organiser. Arthur Balfour sat for the *Vanity Fair* cartoon of the Fourth Party, but his tie to it was comparatively slack. Though joining in its attacks on the Government, the nephew of Lord Salisbury, who had succeeded Lord Beaconsfield in the leadership of the Conservative Peers, was circumspect in his treatment of the “mandarins.” He accounted for his sitting with the Fourth Party by saying that a front bench enabled him to stretch out his long legs!

Lord Randolph at the head of the bench confronted the Government with a flaming sword. I recall the aggressive young aristocrat, a dandy in get-up, twirling his martial moustache, placing his hands at his waist, leaning forward and prodding his right heel on the floor. His speech, though not so polished as his son’s, was extremely pungent, with invective and railery and lively personalities. He flew often at Gladstone, provoking him to controversy.

By seizing every opportunity for attack on the Government he rallied and animated the Conservative party, and eventually it turned with hope to the aspiring

young leader. As St. John, the famous Parliamentarian said, men "grow, like hounds, fond of the man who shows them game and by whose halloo they are used to be encouraged."

As a Tory democrat, Lord Randolph competed with Chamberlain, the Radical democrat, in popular appeals. A duel between the two champions was fought on the floor of the House. It arose over the riots at Aston Manor, Birmingham, where a great Conservative demonstration was smashed by the local Radicals. For the disorderly proceedings Chamberlain and his Caucus were blamed. The Parliamentary duel, with its charges and counter-charges, was a spirited affair, accompanied by acclamations from the partisans on the two sides.

I have witnessed stirring scenes at many Government defeats, but scarcely any so ebullient as in the summer of 1885 at the overthrow of the mighty Gladstone. Ostensibly, it occurred on Childers's Budget. For the first time the Chancellor of the Exchequer had to provide as much as 100 millions—a sum that excited the House; but though his proposed ways and means were contested they were not the fatal issue.

Really the defeat, effected by a combination of Irish Nationalists with Conservatives for which Lord Randolph was largely responsible, was due to an accumulation of grievances against the Government and to the apathy of a large section of its supporters and differences among the Ministers themselves. When the result of the division was announced, Lord Randolph jumped on his seat, waved his handkerchief, and gaily led the ecstatic shouts of the Conservatives.

A victory for his aggressive tactics, it enabled him to make his own terms with the new Prime Minister. A cynic said Randolph appointed the Ministers and Lord Salisbury submitted the list to the Queen.

For Chamberlain, also, glittering prospects opened. In office the Board of Trade, although he made the most of it, had not provided sufficient scope for his political activities. He took a forceful part in controversies outside his own province. In Imperial affairs Bright called him a jingo; in domestic affairs the contented class called him a dangerous demagogue. Now he was free from the restraints of office. He was depicted trying on Gladstone's mantle.

I thought then that he would become the head of a Liberal Government, and I still believe that but for the breach in the party on Irish Home Rule he would have attained that position. Moderate Liberals wanted Hartington; Dilke (under whom Chamberlain was willing to serve) and Harcourt also were regarded as potential Prime Ministers. No one thought for a long time yet of Campbell-Bannerman who, as the fourth holder of the office of Chief Secretary for Ireland in the 1880-85 Government, was so unmoved by Nationalist vituperation that T. P. O'Connor likened him to a sand-bag. The popular call in the Liberal ranks in the country was for "Joe."

The most piquant and pushful personality of his generation, Chamberlain was prolific in schemes for the betterment of the country and especially its poor, and he set them forth in racy, challenging speeches. He distinguished himself in Parliament by a direct, incisive style, dispensing with the circumlocution practised by older men in office, and driving home his argument with equal precision and power. He had an ample store of good English, and in their structure his sentences were a model.

I found in transcribing my notes that it was unnecessary to alter a phrase in order to make his speeches grammatical. Hansard had no easier task than in reproducing them.

I heard also many of his platform speeches. At Birmingham I was surprised that the citizens cheered him even more than his veteran colleague, Bright. Never was he more dazzling than at a Cobden Club dinner at Greenwich. While Gladstone hypnotised audiences by his eloquence Chamberlain excited them by his audacious sallies. He not only enlivened speeches with personal hits, but also adorned them with literary allusions. These were none the less effective because they were not, as a rule, unfamiliar.

The best speeches of Chamberlain's life were, I think, those setting forth his "Unauthorized Programme." They enlivened the interregnum while Lord Salisbury's "Ministry of Caretakers" was carrying on, pending the General Election at the end of 1885, on the extended franchise in the redistributed areas. The "Daring Duckling" of Tenniel's cartoon disturbed the sedate and timid brood of Liberals, but he went on fearlessly and dealt light-heartedly with the Whigs who tried to abate his ardour. Hartington was Rip van Winkle; Goschen was "the skeleton at the feast." He himself in turn was likened by Northcote to Jack Cade—"an ill-used and much misunderstood gentleman," he retorted.

Opponents in the later phase of his life took pleasure in confronting him with phrases that he used at this period. There was his gibe at Lord Salisbury as the spokesman of a class who "toil not, neither do they spin," and there was his warning to the House of Lords, in respect of the accumulating grievances of Radicals, that "the cup is nearly full." He excited the fury of the squires by his contention that the agricultural labourers had been robbed of their land and he fluttered Whig and Tory by such phrases as the "convenient cant of selfish wealth." A still greater shock was caused by his suggestion of "ransom" for the security that property enjoyed. "Insurance" was the word with which he subsequently expressed his meaning, but those who shared his idea clung to "ransom."

It is not surprising that Socialists and Radicals of later days quoted his "Unauthorized Programme." Not only did he press for the free education and the extension of local government which were carried out within a few years, but he also advocated the payment of members, manhood suffrage and the abolition of plural voting. A graduated Income Tax, Disestablishment, and reform of the land laws, with the breaking up of great estates as the first step, were among his other proposals.

The loss to the Liberal party by the breach between Gladstone and Chamberlain was incalculable. But for the breach which deprived Chamberlain of the chance of the party's leadership the course of political history in the next twenty years might have been different. Followers of Gladstone admitted that he did not deal tactfully with the younger man. He did not extend to Chamberlain the confidence which he gave to other colleagues regarding the evolution of his views on Irish Home Rule nor did he, on forming his third Government in 1886, sufficiently recognize the Radical leader's claim to high office.

With the aid of the Nationalists in the new Parliament Gladstone turned out the Salisbury Government on a side issue, the provision of "Three acres and a cow." In his new Government Lord Rosebery, the most brilliant of the younger Liberals, was Foreign Secretary: John Morley zealous for Home Rule was Chief Secretary for

Ireland; and Harcourt was Chancellor of the Exchequer. This position some of Gladstone's colleagues thought should have been given to Chamberlain.

Chamberlain wanted the Irish Office when Forster resigned, but was passed over. Now he wished to have the Colonial Office, but his request was rejected. A Secretaryship of State was beyond his grasp! He was offered and accepted the Local Government Board, a Department congenial to him but not then of the high status that it afterwards held. He resigned a month or two later when the Cabinet decided on Irish Home Rule.

In the Lobby there was a lot of talk about the personal feeling of Gladstone and Chamberlain at this critical time. One set of critics said Gladstone was out of sympathy with the Chamberlain type of personality, a type new to him, and resented his lieutenant's promulgation of an unauthorized programme. Another set of gossips said Chamberlain was in a hurry to take Gladstone's place. Undoubtedly there was incompatibility of tradition and temper; but experience of political crises makes me sceptical of stories of statesmen being influenced in momentous decisions by personal feeling.

### CHAPTER III

#### GLADSTONE'S BOLD ADVENTURE

*Home Rule Manoeuvring—Brilliant Debates—The Liberal Unionists—Feud of old colleagues—the G.O.M.'s defeat—New orientation of Political History—Lord Randolph's opportunity—"Those Damned Dots"—Startling Resignation—"Forgot Goschen"—Statesman's death at No. 10.*

IN THE HISTORIC SESSION OF 1886 GLADSTONE SET OUT ON THE GREAT ADVENTURE which was to split his party and engage and baffle him for the remainder of his life. It was an exciting time. The House of Commons was so crowded that chairs were placed between the two sides, from the Bar to the table, when Gladstone expounded the Irish Home Rule Bill. His speech occupied three and a half hours, and I doubt if a single man went out during its delivery.

The pulse of Parliament was raised to fever heat by the new policy and the combination against it of its author's most formidable lieutenants, who had been sharply divided on other questions. Along with the Conservatives in opposition to Home Rule were not only the Whigs, led by Hartington, but also a group of Radicals led by Chamberlain, who had advocated a National Council, but resolutely resisted a Parliament, for Ireland. Chamberlain's antagonism was specially obnoxious to Home Rulers. There was between him and Gladstone one of many sharp passages at the opening of their duel.

I have seldom seen such excitement in the House as when the "Old Parliamentary Hand" forbade Chamberlain, in attacking the Home Rule Bill, to quote his resignation letter regarding the Irish Land Purchase scheme, which formed part of his case against the Government policy. A long altercation took place between the gladiators in the sight and hearing of the intensely interested House, Chamberlain repeatedly insisting on his right to make the quotation, Gladstone persistently barring his way on the ground that the Queen's permission to state the reasons of his resignation did not extend to the Land Scheme. To the delight of the Home

Rulers and particularly of the Irish, Chamberlain's tactics were frustrated. But although annoyed he recast his speech as he stood.

Political manoeuvring accompanied the debates on the first and second readings of the Bill. There were anxious negotiations of Liberals, daily conferences of groups, counting of heads on the one side and the other. Statesmen resorted to Lobbying who had never before engaged in it.

The debates, ranging over sixteen nights, were the finest on a political question that I have heard. There was a brilliant clash of strong personalities. Not only was Chamberlain extremely pungent and vivacious, but Hartington displayed more vigour than at any other time. Hartington's influence on the Liberal doubters was exceeded only by John Bright's. Although Bright, out of consideration for Gladstone, did not speak, the knowledge that he was to vote against the second reading of the Bill influenced many Radicals.

Men who heard all Gladstone's speeches, as I heard them, during the last thirteen years of his Parliamentary life, differed in opinion as to which was the finest. The last was the best until the next exercised its spell. His speech on the Affirmation Bill in 1883, with its religious reverence and its quotation from Lucretius, was described by a colleague as one of the noblest efforts of human oratory. Some members gave the highest place to his speech in winding up the debate on the Second Reading of the Home Rule Bill.

I recall the solemn thrill of his voice in the peroration: "Think, I beseech you; think well, think wisely, think, not for the moment but for the years that are to come, before you reject this Bill."

There were Conservatives as well as Liberals in the years that were to come who, in view of what happened in Eire, regretted that Gladstone's appeal for an Irish Parliament, subject to the supremacy of the Parliament at Westminster, was disregarded. But it is dangerous to judge the past by the present. Opponents of Home Rule believed that the safeguards of Imperial supremacy were illusory, and that it would lead to the disruption of the Union and the Empire and to the surrender of loyal people to the terrorists.

The result of the division which determined the future course of political life was in doubt till the last moment of uncertainty about the Liberal vote. When the slip with the figures was handed by the Clerk to the Unionist Whip and the House knew that the Bill was rejected the cheers of the victorious parties were so prolonged that the tellers had to stand at the table for several minutes before the figures could be announced. The demonstration was renewed when they revealed a hostile majority of thirty.

I was told by a member who sat in the House with Palmerston that personal feeling became better in the latter part of Queen Victoria's reign than it was earlier. There was now a reaction, and feeling was extremely bad. The relations between the Gladstonians and the Liberal Unionists, whom the Gladstonians called Liberal dissentients, were specially strained. Home Rulers resented the part that Chamberlain played in thwarting the "Grand Old Man." Parnellites called him "Judas" and his friend, Morley, hurt him by attributing to him the rôle of "the envious Casca." He was taunted with having forfeited the succession to the Liberal leadership. That he had done so was admitted by Chamberlain himself.

In the General Election, on Gladstone's appeal to the country, Hartington, Goschen and Chamberlain struck resounding blows at Home Rule, and Bright now

joined them in denouncing the surrender to "rebels." Randolph Churchill shocked friends by his language. The "grand young man" jeered at "an old man in a hurry" and, with invective more savage than has been familiar in a later generation, wrote in his Election Address of Gladstone's "boundless egoism" and "senile vanity."

A new arrangement of political life dates from 1886. The Gladstonian Liberals, defeated in the Election, were, except for three years, out of office for two decades. For six years the Conservatives held office, with the Liberal Unionists as a buttress, and after the three years' interlude Conservatives and Liberal Unionists were in power for ten years.

Although the Conservatives were the largest party in the new Parliament the followers of Hartington and Chamberlain held the balance between them and the Home Rulers. Salisbury wanted Hartington to take the Prime Ministership and form a Coalition Government, but, as many of the Radical Unionists were not yet prepared for fusion with the Conservatives, he declined.

Randolph Churchill in these circumstances got his opportunity. In the previous year he pushed Northcote out of the House of Commons and compelled the Prime Minister to give the leadership of the House and the Chancellorship of the Exchequer to Hicks Beach. Now these places fell inevitably to himself. As leader of the House, Lord Randolph won its admiration by his courtesy and dignity, and as Chancellor of the Exchequer he gained the respect of the exacting Treasury officials. The story has often been told of his remark about decimals: "I never could make out what these damned dots were." That was his flippant vein. He took his duties at the Treasury in the spirit of great predecessors.

The country was startled when he threw up his high position after five months. In preparing the Budget which he never opened, but which was outlined in his biography by his son, he demanded a reduction of the Army and Navy Estimates. As the Prime Minister stood by the heads of the War Office and Admiralty, who refused the demand, Lord Randolph took the step which closed his official career forever.

Political "sensation" is a phrase I dread to use after reading A. P. Herbert's *What a Word*, but if it can ever be justified it is appropriate to the excitement caused by the announcement in *The Times* of Lord Randolph's resignation. Even his own colleagues were staggered. Churchill wrote his letter of resignation to Salisbury when on a visit to the Queen. Lord George Hamilton, who was a guest at the same time, says in *Parliamentary Reminiscences and Reflections* that he wrote it on Windsor Castle notepaper: he consulted nobody and did not inform Her Majesty. The official world was doubly shocked when it heard that Lord Randolph authorized the publication of the news before it had been communicated to the Queen, but he may well have assumed that the Prime Minister's acceptance of his resignation was known to Her Majesty. Anyhow, it is clear that he was determined that it should be regarded as definitive.

The Government was badly shaken. Some of its friends feared it might fall. In this extremity Salisbury turned again to Hartington. The Liberal Unionist leader still declined either to form a Coalition or to join the Conservative Government but on his advice, his colleague, Goschen, who was in a freer position, accepted the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer.

A few years previously, although critical of the Liberal Government behind which he sat, Goschen said he was not prepared to give a "blank cheque" to

\* Salisbury. Now, in the new political conditions, he found no vital difference between himself and the Conservative Prime Minister; and by his acceptance of office the eminent financier and trenchant debater saved the Government.

"I forgot Goschen" has become the classic term for a political miscalculation. It is recorded in contemporary Memoirs that Lord Randolph made the remark to friends and the inference was drawn that he considered himself indispensable and expected to supplant Salisbury. On the other hand, colleagues have testified that he made no tactical preparation for his sensational stroke. Whether it was deliberate or sprung from a sudden impulse, many men in all parties have since his day looked on his action in the cause of economy as the bravest and best in his too-short life.

The sudden death of Lord Iddesleigh, as Northcote had become, was one of the most tragic personal events in modern political history. He might well have aspired to the Prime Ministership in 1885, but when Salisbury was chosen he accepted a peerage, with a sinecure office. In Salisbury's second Government he was appointed Foreign Secretary, but when, on its reconstruction, he offered to retire the Prime Minister promptly took over the Foreign Office himself. By a mischance Lord Iddesleigh did not know that he was thus dispensed with until he got the news at his Devonshire home from a reporter. Naturally his feelings were hurt, but on coming to London he called at No. 10 Downing Street, and it was hoped that by an explanation any soreness would be removed. He collapsed in an ante-room, with a heart attack which did not surprise his doctor, and expired in the presence of the Prime Minister. Grief was expressed everywhere at this ending of a most honourable life; Salisbury himself felt the tragedy acutely.

## CHAPTER IV

### A GREAT CECIL

*Picture of the Premier—"Pussy" Granville—"Old Morality"—Closure—Black Balls—Goschen—"Union of Hearts"—The Newcastle Programme—John Bright's Death—Arthur Balfour Emerges—Lord Randolph's Glass of Water—The Forged Letter—The O'Shea Divorce—Parnell's Desperate Defiance.*

LORD SALISBURY, FREE FROM RANDOLPH CHURCHILL'S RESTLESS COMPANY, SAT comfortably in the saddle till 1892, with a trusted team behind him and the support of the Liberal Unionists. Although his supreme authority was exercised without challenge he was not one of the men in the highest position who supervised the administration of colleagues. That supervision had become less and less practicable and it did not appeal to Salisbury. He concentrated his attention on international affairs. In that domain by his patient, pacific policy—it might be called appeasement policy—he won the approval of many who formerly distrusted him. Liberals used to say that if they had ceded Heligoland to Germany in exchange for recognition of our Protectorate of Zanzibar a loud outcry would have been raised. Carried out by the Conservative chief, the transaction caused little stir beyond some grumbling.

He spent his days at the Foreign Office and his evenings as often as possible at Hatfield, hurrying in his brougham from the office or from the House of Lords to the train at King's Cross. For social gatherings he had no liking.

One of his colleagues, to whom I spoke of his aloofness, said he ought to mix with people in a club. But he was not a club-man. Even his own House of Commons' colleagues he seldom met except in Cabinet, and amusing stories were told of his failure to identify some of them outside. As Bagehot said of Guizot, his mind was not stirred by what was external; the internal activity of the mind overmastered the perceptive power.

Lord Salisbury was unconventional and indifferent to personal appearance. I used to see the massive, bearded figure passing from the Central Lobby to the House of Lords, with his coat clumsily hanging from his round shoulders. In this respect he was repeated in the next generation by Viscount Cecil of Chelwood. The state-of his silk hat on his great head would have shocked the Foreign Office young men of the present day—perhaps it shocked those in his own day—and when he left the House of Lords it was still more ruffled. On sitting down he took the hat by both hands and thrust it underneath his seat, regardless of consequences.

During the 'eighties, Salisbury was faced by Earl Granville, Gladstone's confidential friend and Foreign Secretary, of whom a most interesting biography was written by Lord Fitzmaurice. The number of Liberal peers had decreased enormously. Many crossed to the Conservative party or their successors did so. Some of Gladstone's former colleagues, including Selborne, his Lord Chancellor, and the eloquent and erudite Duke of Argyll, took the Unionist side when he proposed Home Rule. But "Pussy" Granville in debate, with suave, soft, dexterous touch and wide knowledge of foreign affairs, was no mean antagonist of the Conservative Premier.

I knew when Salisbury was preparing to speak; his knees bobbed rapidly up and down. In the Press Gallery he was heard easily; unlike most peers, then and now, he faced our gallery. His speeches, as finished in form as his early newspaper articles or his dispatches, were enlivened by caustic wit and sarcasm. He spoke without notes but at the appropriate point took from his pocket a slip of paper with a damaging quotation.

"Blazing indiscretions" (Morley's phrase) embarrassed Salisbury's sensitive friends and provided opponents with ammunition. The Cecils have the habit of frankness, and the famous head of their family, whom Disraeli described as "a great master of gibes and flouts and jeers," carried the practice to a degree imprudent in a political leader. Opponents seized on his comparison of lawless, terrorist Irishmen to Hottentots; and when he recommended twenty years of resolute government, which was translated into twenty years of coercion, every Liberal platform resounded with the words. Much use was made of his gibe at a later period that rural life would be rendered more interesting by a circus than by Parish Councils.

A first-rate leader of the House of Commons was found, after Churchill's resignation, in W. H. Smith. He was one of the butts of Lord Randolph's gibes in Fourth Party days, but he rose steadily in the estimation of colleagues. He was no orator, nor was he a ready debater. Many of his speeches were rounded off with homilies on duty to Queen and country which won for him from "Toby," of *Punch*,

the title of "Old Morality." It was by strict attention to the business of the House that the shrewd, unpretentious Victorian, with side whiskers, made his mark on Parliamentary annals. I have never known a better leader.

With the office of First Lord of the Treasury, to which no Departmental duties were attached, Smith kept watch on the House hour after hour. Instead of going home to dinner, as was the practice of colleagues in those days, he dined on a chop in his room. Long after midnight he remained on duty, leaving debate to other Ministers but ready to move "That the question be now put." When as the years advanced he suffered from painful illness he would sit on the Treasury bench with a rug across his knees.

New measures were adopted to check the Obstruction which was revived and persistently practised by the Irish and the more ardent of their Liberal allies after the defeat of Home Rule. For a long period in 1887 the average hour of adjournment was 2.20 in the morning. The Closure, established in 1882, operated only on the initiative of the Speaker, who naturally shrank from interposing in party conflicts. It was made more useful in 1887-88 by the entitling of any member to move that the question be now put. The ordinary Closure was reinforced by devices with which we became familiar, the "Guillotine," which chops off discussion on the stage of a bill at a pre-arranged hour, and the "Kangaroo," which enables the Chair to skip over one amendment to another.

From 1888 we got home earlier than before, though not so early as at present. Opposed business ceased at midnight, and the House rose at one o'clock ; at any rate that was the rule, but the rule was often suspended.

There is no bitterness like the bitterness of parted colleagues. Life-long opponents did not regard each other with the rancour of Gladstonians and Liberal Unionists. The animosity of these estranged friends was carried into the clubs. A Home Ruler was black-balled at Brooks's, and in retaliation a Unionist suffered the same fate. This process was ended by the conciliatory intervention of Earl Granville. But in the House of Commons the warfare was conspicuously maintained.

The principal Liberal Unionists, Hartington, Chamberlain and Sir Henry James, who declined the Woolsack in the Gladstone Government of 1886, sat on the front Opposition bench beside Gladstone, Harcourt and Morley. Their support of the Conservative Government from that position exasperated the Home Rulers.

Hopes were raised in sanguine Opposition quarters that agreement on Irish policy might be reached with Chamberlain at a Round Table, but the conference resulted in recrimination. Sir George Trevelyan, who left the Liberal Government at the same time as Chamberlain, returned to the Gladstonian fold. Chamberlain acted permanently with Hartington, on the Unionist side, and former friends muttered angrily when, rising from the same bench as Gladstone, he attacked his old leader. Randolph Churchill described the Liberal Unionists as a "useful kind of crutch." They were more than a crutch to the Conservative Government.

I enjoyed the duels between Harcourt and Goschen. Harcourt was Gladstone's ablest Parliamentary lieutenant. He was much more effective in debate than Morley. Home Rulers were delighted by his boisterous attacks on the Unionists. With Goschen he had specially vigorous encounters. Both were hard hitters and they hit one another with zest. Harcourt described his former Liberal colleague as a deserter, and was in turn described by Goschen as a soldier of fortune.

Goschen became a strong pillar of the Government. Although he lived to take a formidable part in political affairs in the twentieth century, he had already had a long and prominent career. He was a great intellectual of the Victorian Liberal type and was distinguished for his part in the movement to throw Universities open to Dissenters. His service in Liberal Cabinets went back to Russell's, though with his cross-bench mind he found it easy now to throw in his lot with the Conservatives.

Short-sight prevented Goschen from accepting Gladstone's offer some years previously to nominate him for the Chair. He held his notes close to his face and he fumbled for the string to his eye-glass when it dropped to his waist. His voice was hoarse and his gesticulations were ungainly. But he had an excellent literary style, and a command of striking phrases, and in controversy he seized on the vital issue and was always ready to deal with interruptions.

His successful conversion of a large portion of the National Debt enhanced his reputation as a financier and contributed to the credit of the Government. Among its other achievements were the establishments of County Councils, by a Bill in charge of Ritchie, a man of plain, solid ability; the provision of free education in elementary schools; and a great Housing Act. Chamberlain used his influence on behalf of these items of his Radical programme and was gratified by their adoption.

Ireland was the main battle-ground in the 1886-92 Parliament. With an effusive "union of hearts," at which their opponents jeered, British Liberals and Irish Nationalists fought against coercion. Gladstone's energy in the fight was marvellous in a man of his age. His voice rang out session after session in animated appeal and denunciation. To win British electors who wanted something for their own country he was constrained by colleagues to set forth at Newcastle the multifarious set of reforms known thenceforth as the Newcastle Programme, but his interest was centred in the Irish cause.

Parnell did not gush over the "union of hearts." Except in one or two instances he held as aloof from Liberals as from his own colleagues, but the new alliance was exhibited dramatically when Earl Spencer and Parnell sat side by side at an Eighty Club dinner. Spencer's conversion to Home Rule aroused the enthusiasm of the Irish. It was said by a Unionist that the Parnellites blackened his character when he was Viceroy and now were ready to blacken his boots. Spencer was a zealous Liberal with a high sense of duty and grave, dignified manner, and was long regarded as a possible Prime Minister.

I turn from my notes to ask myself if the present generation is interested in those events and agitations. My answer is that they relate to an issue which has continued from the Victorian age till the Second Great War and is concerned with historic personages.

John Bright died in 1889, an honoured relic of far past times. The whole House mourned his death. Tributes to him were paid by all parties, and the finest tribute came from his oldest friend. Gladstone said he had elevated political life to a loftier standard and had bequeathed to his country a character worthy not only of admiration and gratitude but of reverential contemplation.

I have seldom seen members of Parliament so surprised as when Arthur James Balfour was appointed Chief Secretary for Ireland. The Irish Office, which Hicks

Beach resigned on account of eye-sight trouble, was the most exacting in the Government. It had eight occupants in six years, and most of them left it with shaken reputation. And here came a dilettante, a delicate-looking, elegant man with side whiskers and curls above the ears, whose best known achievement was *A Defence of Philosophic Doubt*. His appointment was accounted for only by the fact that he was the Prime Minister's nephew.

Unionists were disturbed by it. Irish Nationalists hailed it with glee. They laughed at "Miss Nancy," "Miss Clara," "the supercilious young person," "the scented popinjay," who was more interested in the Monday Pops than in politics. They had baffled and beaten strong men. They looked forward to the easy discomfiture of the new Irish ruler.

Never was prediction more completely falsified. The man at whom the Nationalists had mocked was stigmatised by them later, in epithets applied by O'Connell to the Whigs, as "the base, bloody, and brutal" Balfour—language which seemed to the next generation as inappropriate as the original ridicule. Law and Order were defied in Ireland by the political and agrarian organisations of the Nationalists. In the House of Commons they were extremely and incessantly aggressive. With their mastery of Parliamentary tactics and their extraordinary supply of able speakers and debaters, they were a formidable force. And in resistance to aggressive measures they were aided by Gladstone and his followers.

Balfour proved worthy of their steel. He was the strong man that the Unionists wanted. He turned away from the medicine bottles with which he was formerly supplied. He ruled Ireland with unflinching firmness and counter-attacked his assailants in Parliament with dexterity and spirit. Under their invective he remained serene. As he reclined on his bench and adjusted his pince-nez to glance at an abusive member his nonchalance inflamed the fury of the Nationalists as much as it was inflamed by the railly of the letters that he wrote about William O'Brien's woes over prison clothes. By the steady pursuit of the policy in which he followed coercion with remedial legislation and by the brilliance of his Parliamentary performances he aroused among Unionists an enthusiasm rarely equalled in any party.

I doubt if Arthur Balfour was ever so happy—not even when he became Prime Minister—as he was in those days of his rapidly mounting fame.

Evidence of his fame and popularity was given in the curiosity and interest that were excited by his devotion to golf, a game from which, he said, care was kept at a distance. To his example was due its rapid spread south of the Border.

There was no question who should be the Leader of the House of Commons when W. H. Smith died (on the same day as Parnell) at the end of 1891. With the warm approval of the whole Conservative party their new hero was appointed. Hicks Beach and Goschen readily gave way to Balfour.

Meanwhile Randolph Churchill passed dreary years on a back bench, alienated from old colleagues. I wondered, as he gave his independent opinion on Government policy, in praise or blame, whether he would ever regain a position worthy of his talents. The aloofness of former friends was shown during a severe attack that he made on the Government. He paused to ask for a glass of water. No one near him jumped up. Thinking that his request had not been heard Lord Randolph repeated it, and thereupon Arthur Baumann, a young Conservative barrister below the Gangway, hurried out.

"I hope this will not compromise you with your party," Lord Randolph exclaimed in an aside, which I heard in the Gallery, when Baumann handed to him the glass of water. To this day these words are repeated ironically when a member takes a conspicuous course disagreeable to his party leaders.

The prospects of Home Rule fluctuated. The tide flowed for a short time in Gladstone's favour. People wearied of the long inquiry by Special Commission into "Parnellism and Crime." I sat through it and nothing was more tiresome in my experience. The Commission found grave charges against the Nationalists proven but attention was fastened on the letter, published in facsimile by *The Times*, purporting to have been written by Parnell, apparently in apology for his condemnation of the Phoenix Park crime. When the forgery of the letter by Pigott was exposed, the forger fleeing thereupon to Madrid and shooting himself, there was a wave of sympathy with Parnell. His own proud contempt was shown in a marked manner. He spoke at an Eighty Club dinner about the time of the exposure, but made not the slightest reference to what was in the minds of his audience.

"Because a Nationalist journalist has forged the signature of the Nationalist leader—that is no proof that the leader possesses every statesmanlike quality and virtue." So said Lord Salisbury in his caustic way. But many people felt free to think better of Parnell than they formerly thought and the sympathy with him swelled the Home Rule tide. By-elections were won by Liberals, one of the most notable being Lloyd George's victory, in April, 1890.

The tide soon ebbed. The outlook was completely changed by the divorce case in which Parnell was found guilty of adultery with Mrs. O'Shea, the wife of a political friend. Revelation of the intrigue which accounted for his frequent absences from Parliament took zeal for Home Rule out of the heart of many Liberals; and a schism in the Nationalist party which further depressed the Liberals was caused by Gladstone's declaration in a letter to Morley that Parnell's retention of the Irish leadership would reduce his own leadership almost to a nullity.

Committee Room No. 15 in the long corridor is still shown to visitors to the House of Commons. Here the Nationalists met to decide whether they should throw over their leader. British parties waited eagerly for a decision, bound to influence their own future. Would the Irishmen stand by Parnell, at the risk of a breach with their powerful Liberal friend?

For twelve days there were behind closed doors passionate speeches and dramatic episodes. Parnell fought desperately, but when he could no longer protract the controversy only twenty-six members stood by him; forty-four joined in his deposition. Justin McCarthy, the new Chairman of the Nationalists, was described by Parnell as "a nice old gentleman for a quiet tea party." A haggard, indomitable figure, the dethroned "king" made a frantic effort in Ireland to retain his rule while he tried to excite suspicion of Gladstone's proposals. His struggle ended only on his death in October, 1891, at the age of forty-five. Eloquent John Redmond, distinguished later as the leader of the reunited Nationalist party, was for some years Chairman of the Parnellite section.

## CHAPTER V

### A FAMOUS DUEL

*Keir Hardie's Arrival—New Blood in Government—Second Home Rule Bill—Exciting Scenes—Gladstone and Chamberlain—The Cry of "Judas"—Tumult in the House—Members Fight—Speaker Peel's Triumph—Gladstone's Retirement and Legacy—Rosebery and Harcourt—An Unhappy Prime Ministership—Asquith and Lloyd George—Randolph Churchill's Last Attacks—A Bold Budget—The Cordite Vote—The "G.O.M.'s" Last Speech—Rosebery Resigns Party Leadership—An Incident in the Abbey.*

I NEVER HEARD ANYONE CHARGE GLADSTONE WITH WANT OF COURAGE. HE SHOWED how amply supplied he was with that quality when, at the age of eighty-two, he formed his fourth Government. In the General Election of 1892 the Home Rulers suffered from the O'Shea-Parnell divorce. It was only by a majority of forty that the Liberals and their allies defeated the Salisbury Government in the new Parliament. That was a hazardous majority with which to take office, especially as it depended on the Parnellites, but the "G.O.M." was determined to make another attempt to carry Home Rule.

The election of Keir Hardie, one of the founders of the Independent Labour party, was a political portent. There were Liberal-Labour members in the House, but here came the forerunner of a new force in Parliament. A group of friends, with a cornet-player, accompanied Keir Hardie in a waggonette to Westminster. He wore a deer-stalker's cap, a tweed suit and a flannel shirt with soft collar. Conventional members looked on the cap as disrespectful. It was a symbol not of disrespect but of the political revolt of workers against the frock-coated top-hatted classes.

Able men of two generations were gathered under Gladstone's banner. Rosebery was persuaded by Queen Victoria, though reluctantly, to return to the Foreign Office, where he desired that Liberals and Conservatives should pursue continuity in policy. Harcourt, again Chancellor of the Exchequer, was the second man in the Government. John Morley, again Irish Secretary, was Gladstone's closest and most trusted colleague in the cause of his old age.

New blood was taken into the Government. Asquith, the brilliant lawyer who had distinguished himself on the Opposition side by his fine intellect and debating power, became Home Secretary, and Sir Edward Grey as Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs began his long, intimate experience of that Department. These two, along with Haldane and Arthur Acland, were closely bound together by their interest in social reform.

For the second time a working man received office. Henry Broadhurst, the stonemason, was an Under-Secretary in Gladstone's 1886 Government. Thomas Burt, the miner, now became Secretary to the Board of Trade. Refined in face and character, Burt read Gibbon in years when he was working at the pit, and he and Grey quoted poetry to one another at Westminster. Wordsworth was a favourite of both.

There were two occasions in this exciting period when it was necessary to place chairs along the floor of the House. The first was when Chamberlain, who had been elected Liberal Unionist leader in the House of Commons on Hartington's succession to the Peerage as Duke of Devonshire, spoke against the vote of no-confidence in the Conservative Government.

The crush was still greater at Gladstone's introduction of his second Home Rule Bill. Members assembled hours before the doors were opened and scrambled over benches in their eagerness to secure seats. The Prince of Wales (the future King Edward) sat over the clock with his son, the Duke of York at his side, and Princess May (the future Queen Mary) was in the Ladies' Gallery.

Gladstone spoke for two and a quarter hours. His speech had not the fire or eloquence of his exposition of the first Home Rule Bill, but it secured the admiration even of his opponents not only by its intellectual skill but also by its delivery. Voice and gesture were marvellous. A later generation recalled, with poignant feeling, his prophetic warning that the demand for self-government in Irish affairs might, if the controversy were unwarrantably prolonged, become a demand in less favourable circumstances for the repeal of the Union, and for a dual sovereignty within these islands.

I do not think there has been for several generations—certainly there has not been in the last sixty years—such a gigantic struggle between two British statesmen as that in 1893 between Gladstone and Joseph Chamberlain, the two greatest debaters I have known. Still sitting among Liberals, and claiming to be a truer Liberal than the Gladstonians, Chamberlain attacked the Home Rule Bill and its author from the corner of the third bench below the Ministerial gangway. Balfour and Goschen (now a member of the Carlton Club) were formidable assailants, but Chamberlain was the fiercest and most persistent. Every day, scathing in thrust and swift in riposte, he engaged in encounters with Gladstone and his followers and allies. "Leave him alone," experienced men cried to reckless colleagues who ventured to challenge the pugnacious figure with the monocle and the orchid.

Gladstone himself was never seen to greater advantage as a fighter. He delighted Home Rulers by the taunts and ironic rejoinders which he flung at his former Radical lieutenant.

There was a brief break in their passionate altercation when Gladstone referred to Austen Chamberlain's maiden speech as a speech "that must have been dear and refreshing to a father's heart." The father leaned forward and his face quivered at this magnanimous tribute from the great old chief, whom he ever held in personal respect and addressed in private "Sir." But the political duel went on to the fatal end.

I trembled for the fame and fate of Parliament as I witnessed the extremely violent, disgraceful scene, in July, 1893, and saw members hitting each other. The guillotine was timed to fall on the Committee stage of the hotly debated Home Rule Bill. All parties were excited, and the excitement boiled over when Chamberlain in his incisive tone taunted Gladstone's followers with such slavish adulation as had never been seen since the time of Herod. "Judas" shouted T. P. O'Connor, as he glared at Chamberlain. This shout infuriated the Unionists, and a tumult ensued.

It was impossible to clear the House for the division. Members stood in all quarters, Conservatives insisting that O'Connor's offensive word should be taken

down by the Clerk of the House. During the tumult a tall, stalwart Radical (Mr. Logan) standing at the Opposition side of the table had an altercation with Carson. On being told that it was out of order to stand he took the nearest seat—among the Conservatives on their front bench. Hayes Fisher, who was immediately behind Logan, seized him by the neck and tried to eject him. Logan retaliated by hitting Hayes Fisher in the face.

Some of the younger Nationalists, ready for a fight, rushed across the gangway to the Conservative quarter. In the mêlée many blows were struck. The blows were exchanged principally by Irishmen, Colonel Saunderson, the doughty and popular Irish Unionist, being the favourite target of the Nationalists. British colleagues too were in the scrimmage; whether to take part with the combatants or to separate them it was difficult to say. The physical struggle, in spite of the appeals and intervention of peace-makers, went on for many minutes while the floor of the House was crowded with members who, by standing and shouting, added to the disorder.

Gladstone, with the nightly letter to the Queen in his hand, looked extremely pained. A loud-voiced, bellicose, junior ex-Minister stood at the table and shouted across to him—"This is *your* doing." Loud hisses from the strangers in the Gallery conveyed their indignation at the conduct of their Parliamentary representatives.

"Send for the Speaker," someone cried when the tumult was beyond the control of the Chairman of Committee. Speaker Peel came, and his appearance had a magical effect.

That was due to his personality as well as to his position. I recall the thrill that I felt when the tall figure, with the short beard, stood at his first election on the step of the Chair. He cast a spell on us all by his dignity and sonorous address. Since then the House held him in awe. He was not only persuasive and tactful in the maintenance of order but also stern and majestic. It was a terrifying experience to be admonished by Speaker Peel. That was the fate of three railway directors, one of them a member of the House, who had dismissed a servant on account of his evidence before a Parliamentary Committee. As they stood at the Bar and received the admonition they quivered under the lash.

And now at the height of the tumult on a summer evening the majestic Speaker came. He ascended the Chair, adjusted his robe, and calmly called "Order! Order!" Immediately there was silence. Members took their proper places, and all eyes turned submissively to the austere, impartial headmaster as he waited to hear what had to be said about the misconduct of the House in his absence. Confused explanations were given, and criminations and recriminations were made. A step to appeasement was taken by an apology from T. P. O'Connor. This process was completed on a later day by expressions of regret from Hayes Fisher and Logan.

The speaker hoped the House would let the incident pass into oblivion. It has never been forgotten by anyone who witnessed it.

Asquith said to me many years later that we in the Press Gallery, the descriptive writers, had exaggerated the worst features of the scene. But Balfour declared in the House that no scene of a similar character had occurred for more than two hundred years, and Morley wrote of it as the most violent since the Civil Wars. I have described here what I saw and recorded at the time.

The Home Rule Bill which occupied the House eighty days was passed by a majority of thirty-four. Many members felt that, in an Asquithian phrase, they were ploughing the sand. Everyone knew the fate that awaited the Bill elsewhere. Hundreds of Peers, whose faces were unfamiliar at Westminster, reinforced those regularly in attendance to destroy the work of the Commons. They returned to the "backwoods" imagining that they had heard the last of Home Rule.

Other measures in a session of enormous length, in which we experienced excessive heat and excessive cold, were either rejected by the Peers or so mutilated that the Government dropped them. The Parish Councils Bill, which Henry Fowler (afterwards Lord Wolverhampton) patiently piloted, was saved by a compromise.

So much work was carried over to 1894 that the Commons, for the first time in modern history, sat on New Year's Day. Gladstone's colleagues had relieved their aged chief as much as he would permit. The arrangement described by the future Lord Darling, then member for Deptford, was for "the greater light to rule the day, the lesser light to rule the night." Harcourt did well as the Lesser Light but the Greater Light, not content with the day, often appeared at night.

At last, in his eighty-fifth year, Gladstone gave up office. His hearing and sight were impaired. Frequently he moved to the gangway end of his bench, with hand behind ear—a courteous, pathetic figure—in order to hear the speeches of members at the lower end of the House. Physical disability was not the only cause of his resignation. In spite of that he might have gone on but for his objection to the Navy estimates.

The last time his voice was heard in the House was on 1st March, 1894, when he announced the Government's reluctant acceptance of the Lords' amendments on the Parish Councils Bill, and handed down as a legacy to his successors the issue raised by the conflict between the two Houses on various questions besides Home Rule. For this "tremendous contrariety and incessant conflict" a solution, as he foretold, would have to be found.

Although the rumour of his impending resignation had spread, few men knew at the moment that his speech on this occasion was his last. But there was in the aspect of those near him the gloom of farewell. I noted, too, that his face was pale and stern and that his voice, rich and full, was solemn in its eloquence. "The great Achilles whom we knew" passed out by the Speaker's chair and the House saw him no more.

On his retirement Lord Salisbury declared that "his was the most brilliant genius that had been applied to the service of the State since Parliamentary government began."

The Queen's appointment of Rosebery as Gladstone's successor was in accord with the desire of nearly the whole Cabinet. If the retiring Premier's advice had been sought by the Sovereign he would have recommended Spencer, but it was not sought and the choice lay between Rosebery and Harcourt.

I saw a Left-Wing group, led by Labouchere, going to the Whips' room, in the interregnum, to protest against the selection of a Peer. Labouchere, the proprietor of *Truth*, whose appointment to office had been vetoed by the Queen, was an ardent Radical as well as an amusing quiz and an inveterate cigarette-smoker before the habit became common. Nobody escaped his quips. Gladstone's religious appeals provoked from the merry cynic a ribald gibe. "I don't mind," he once said, "the

old man having the ace of trumps up his sleeve but I wish he would not try to persuade us that it had been placed there by the Almighty."

The protest that "Labby" led against Rosebery's appointment might have had some weight if Harcourt had not made himself impossible. Harcourt, who, with tall figure, broad shoulders and massive features, was nicknamed "Jumbo," possessed great Parliamentary gifts and had done faithful service to the Liberal Party. But he trod heavily on the feelings of official colleagues.

Morley, although in sympathy with Harcourt's views on Imperial questions, cast his influence on Rosebery's side. I was told that he hoped to get the Foreign Office, but Rosebery handed it over to Lord Kimberley. So, Morley remained at the Irish Office.

No one except Sir Robert Peel, since the passing of the Reform Act, has reached the highest position so young as Rosebery; he was only forty-six. He was the most fascinating man of his generation, with brilliant intellectual powers, eloquence and wit added to personal charm. His devotion to Gladstone from early years was a passport to Liberal hearts. The title "Grand Old Man," although its authorship was commonly attributed to Harcourt, was, I believe, used originally by Rosebery in the early 'eighties. The old man recognised the talents of the young man, and in 1886 pointed him out to the Liberal party as "the man of the future." Besides the high position he had attained since then in Government, he had won popular laurels as Chairman of the London County Council; working men spoke of "Citizen Rosebery" as John Burns's "pal." It was with high hopes that Radicals, apart from the Labouchere group, welcomed his appointment as Prime Minister.

"The Government will be out to-morrow," Lobbyists told each other at the very opening of the Rosebery administration. There were two disturbing incidents. Liberals shook their heads in alarm and the Nationalists were ready to revolt when Rosebery, in his first speech as Prime Minister in the House of Lords, concurred in Salisbury's dictum that before Home Rule was conceded England as the predominant partner would have to be convinced of its justice. This conveyed the impression that a United Kingdom majority would not be sufficient. The same evening in a snap division, Labouchere carried a motion for the abolition of the Lords' Veto. The excitement caused by these events did not last long. Home Rulers accepted Rosebery's explanation that his reference to the "predominant partner" was a mere truism, and the Veto amendment was cancelled. Still, this was not a beginning of good omen.

Few Prime Ministers have had so unhappy an official life. Harcourt accepted the leadership of the Commons and retained the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer under Rosebery, but he was sore at missing the chief place and exhibited his wounds to the world. I heard him at the National Liberal Club describing Rosebery as the leader of the Government "*in the House of Lords.*" It was an open secret that the relations of the two men were often difficult. There was not the confidence between the Prime Minister and the leader of the Commons which was necessary to their full co-operation. "They are not on speaking terms," it was said sometimes; and I learn from A. G. Gardiner's most interesting Life of Harcourt that they ceased to meet except in Cabinet.

Campbell-Bannerman oiled the Government machine with his tolerant, friendly spirit. He was an easy-going, rich man, who lived well and was fond of French novels. In his own sphere as Secretary for War he exhibited his tact in inducing

the Queen's cousin, the Duke of Cambridge, with Her Majesty's approval, to resign the post of Commander-in-Chief to which the Duke had clung tenaciously.

I was surprised to hear from Bryce that "C.B." wished to succeed Peel as Speaker. For that position his qualities fitted him and his nomination would have been popular, but his colleagues could not spare him.

Another Prime Minister of the future, Asquith, justified in office the reputation he had won in Opposition. One of his happiest achievements at the Home Office was in putting an end, by simple regulation, to the frequent conflicts in the use of Trafalgar Square for meetings. The Factories and Workshops Act which he carried was a comprehensive measure for securing the safety and health of the workers. He had an exacting job in piloting the Church in Wales Disestablishment Bill. During its progress Gladstone withdrew his "pair" for the Government. While it was so persistently attacked by the "Church Brigade" that it had not got out of Committee when the Government fell, some trouble was given to Asquith by Lloyd George and other Welsh Nonconformists over its details.

Lloyd George could say what Blowitz, the famous journalist, said when Bismarck, at the Berlin Congress, asked how long he had been studying politics, *Mais depuis que je suis né*. And from his earliest days as a member "L.G." had been bold in debate. He had become widely known as a platform orator in his advocacy of Welsh Disestablishment, and specially on this subject by his replies to the Bishop of St. Asaph. At a meeting in Flintshire the Chairman, a Deacon, introduced Lloyd George thus: "Gentlemen, I haft to introduce to you to-night the member for the Carnarvon Boroughs. He hass come here to reply to what the Bishop of St. Asaph said the other night about Welsh Disestablishment. In my opinion, gentlemen, the Bishop of St. Asaph iss one off the biggest liars in creation; but, thank God—yes, thank God—we haft a match for him to-night." I remember at a dinner in his honour at the Reform Club many years later, when a Welshman quoted this malaprop tribute, Lloyd George joined merrily in the laughter.

A new opportunity came to Randolph Churchill in the 1892-95 Parliament when, on Balfour's invitation, he took his seat on the Conservative front bench. I looked forward to the part that he would play. His friends—and they were by no means confined to one side—hoped that he would revive his former fame and hold again a great position. They were disappointed. His health was failing and had not been restored by distant tours; and when he addressed a crowded House on the Home Rule Bill I was shocked to see a bearded figure, with twitching face and restless hands, and to hear a trembling voice. He was more like his old self on another occasion in a loudly-applauded attack on Gladstone. But the sands were fast running out. There was universal regret when, a few months before his party regained office, he died at the same age as Parnell; he was only forty-five. His son, Winston, was then nineteen.

Cromwell was the subject of a lively controversy. A grant for a memorial in Westminster Hall was voted by Parliament, but the hostility of Irish Nationalists along with English Conservatives led to its withdrawal. Morley, in one of his best speeches, retaliated with an animated eulogy of the Protector; and, thanks to a public-spirited donor, the monument familiar to the present generation was erected

in the low-lying ground outside Westminster Hall. Conservatives, annoyed by its erection, were cynically told by Salisbury that a ditch was an appropriate place for it.

The greatest achievement of the Rosebery Government was Harcourt's Budget, making the Probate Duty applicable, on a graduated scale, to real estate and settled property. A passionate outcry was raised by the landed interests. They denounced the scheme as a death blow to the country houses and lamented that it would lessen the money available for wages and the poor. In spite of those powerful influences and protracted opposition in Parliament, Harcourt not only carried his Budget but carried it without a single resort to the Closure. The House was agreeably surprised by his patience and good temper. He himself would have been surprised if he could have foreseen the huge edifice of death duties raised by another Chancellor on the foundation that he laid.

Differences on Imperial policy which were for long to embarrass the Liberal party disturbed the Government and caused friction between its leaders. Rosebery wanted to peg out claims for additions to the Empire; Harcourt thought the Empire was already large enough. There were differences about Uganda, which might have been abandoned but for Rosebery, and about the extent of our interests in the Nile Valley.

I looked along the Treasury Bench for Harcourt when Edward Grey, the Under-Secretary, in a historic declaration put forward categorically the claim that British and Egyptian spheres of influence covered the whole of the Nile waterway and announced that the advance of a French expedition into that territory would be "an unfriendly act." Harcourt was not present. It was reported that he was surprised and annoyed by the Under-Secretary's declaration. Rumours of a Cabinet crisis were freely circulated.

The precarious state of the Government, with its dissensions and the Parnellites indifferent to its fate, was evident from the opening of the 1895 session, when the Address was carried by a majority of only eight. For the division on an amendment moved by Chamberlain the whipping was extremely severe.

Six members, three on each side, suffering from influenza, were brought from their beds; they waited in a room behind the Speaker's chair.

The marvel was that the Government survived for months on the edge of the precipice. At last a secretly planned stroke by the Opposition pushed it over on a June evening. Its defeat on the question of the supply of cordite for the Army took Ministers and their Whips by surprise. Harcourt was on the Terrace chatting with friends and rejoicing that they were having a quiet evening without a crisis when the division bells rang, and some unsuspecting Liberals, like Labouchere, after voting, hurried home to dinner without waiting to hear the result of the division.

I knew what the defeat portended when "C-B.," who was indignant at the refusal of the Unionists to accept official assurances, locked his dispatch box with a bang. Next day the Government was out, most of its members relieved to escape from an unhappy life; and power passed for ten and a half years to the Coalition of Conservatives and Liberal Unionists.

This was the end of Rosebery's official career and also of his political association with Harcourt. Although many colleagues still looked loyally to Rosebery, he did not receive, in the leadership of the Liberal party, the co-operation which he

considered due to his position, and he gave it up when Gladstone, emerging from seclusion at Hawarden, took an independent part in controversy on the Armenian atrocities.

I went to Hengler's Circus, Liverpool, in September, 1896, and heard the "G.O.M.," in his last speech to a great audience, demanding action against Turkey. He spoke for an hour and a quarter with indomitable spirit. His trumpet appealed to his veterans, and they gazed at him with glistening eyes. But Rosebery was, with Salisbury, against single-handed action by this country, and Gladstone's speech gave the *coup-de-grâce* to his leadership.

The personal affection of the two men survived their political differences. Rosebery, with Morley, was privileged to bid farewell to the venerated chief when his life was ebbing away in 1898.

I never saw the House of Commons so mournful in aspect as on the day of Gladstone's death. Members assembled silently and solemnly, each looking as if he felt a sense of personal bereavement. The House adjourned at once—a rare mark of respect for one who was not at the time a member. The leaders of the two Houses on the following day showed deep feeling in the tributes that they paid to Gladstone, Salisbury honouring "a great Christian statesman," and Balfour "the greatest member of the greatest deliberative assembly that the world has ever seen." The whole country was united in mourning. A quarter of a million people, of every class, filed reverently past the bier enclosing the body of the man, whose memory they cherished, as it lay in State, watched by relays of friends, in Westminster Hall. The march past of the Liberal delegates was extraordinarily impressive.

The incident at the funeral in the Abbey that I remember most distinctly was the tender, gracious act of the Prince of Wales. Mrs. Gladstone was seated at the head of the grave, and the Prince on passing out at the end of the service bent low and kissed her hand. The Prince and the Duke of York were pall-bearers.

## CHAPTER VI

### END OF AN EPOCH

*Chamberlain at Colonial Office—Lord Salisbury's Supremacy—Balfour's Charm—Coalition Government—The Duke—Black Michael—"Splendid Isolation"—"What I have said, I have said"—New Liberal Leader—Liberal "Imps"—Khaki Election—"Hotel Cecil Unlimited"—Queen Victoria's Last Speech—A King on the Throne—Police Eject M.P.s.—War to the knife and fork—Lloyd George in disguise—Balfour Prime Minister—Week-enders.*

THE UNIONIST RÉGIME OF 1895-1905 OPENED IN AUSPICIOUS CONDITIONS. IT SECURED at the General Election a majority of over 150, and a distinguished Coalition Government was formed by Salisbury. There were in the Cabinet 15 Conservatives and four Liberal Unionists. Harcourt, the leader of the orthodox Liberals, "jeered at the cremation of Liberal Unionism in the Tory Crematory." At last the Liberal Unionists sat on the same side of the House as the Conservatives, but Joseph Chamberlain, the Radical, was by no means extinguished.

My eyes fastened on that pugnacious personality when he took his seat on the Treasury bench beside Balfour. "He's at it already," Home Rulers exclaimed, as Chamberlain talked with animation to the leader of the House. They suspected that he was trying at once to get his own way. Eventually he did get his own way in many directions. For his assistance the Conservatives had to "pay the price" in social legislation. The older men grudged the price. "Is not the hand of Joab with thee in all this?" a mocking Conservative asked his party leader.

Chamberlain got from Salisbury the Colonial Office which Gladstone refused him. This office he raised to a prominent place in the Ministerial hierarchy. His ambition was to draw a closer link between the Colonies and the Mother Country, and to promote their development. While carrying out that lofty aim his attention was diverted for long periods by the series of crises in connection with the Transvaal.

Tranquillity, in contrast with the Home Rule agitation, was promised by the Unionist régime. Ministers, with their overwhelming majority in the Commons and a complacent House of Lords, looked forward to a comfortable life. Events disturbed the pleasant prospect.

For long periods, it is true, this Parliament was as dull as any in my experience. But it had its passions, agitations and excitements. Controversies as violent as those on Home Rule in previous times followed Dr. Jameson's abortive raid with British South African troopers on the Transvaal. I have never known more intense acrimony than that with which Chamberlain's opponents dwelt on the (disproved) allegation that he knew of the intention to carry out the raid. Sharp contention on the motives behind it lasted through the long and searching inquiry by a strong Select Committee. The inquiry, doubly interesting on account of the personalities as well as the questions involved, attracted the Prince of Wales and High Society to the Committee Room at the foot of Westminster Hall. Here, Cecil Rhodes, the "Empire Builder," who had been Prime Minister of Cape Colony and Managing Director of the Chartered Company, was closely examined about the raid, and while sitting in the witness's chair he ate sandwiches and drank beer!

The heat felt in those controversies blazed later about the negotiations that Chamberlain and Sir Alfred Milner, the High Commissioner, had with Kruger concerning his treatment of the Uitlanders in the Transvaal, and it blazed also about the Government's policy and conduct of the war with the Boers which ended the nineteenth century.

Lord Salisbury's big personality meanwhile impressed his fellow-countrymen. He had become a national institution, almost as firmly established as Queen Victoria. Chamberlain, in far-off days, called him the spokesman of a class who "toil not, neither do they spin," but though the Radicals then applauded the gibe and laughed at the idea of a Tory working man, there were in the next generation countless toilers and spinners who recognised Salisbury's political honesty and strength.

The value of his life to the country was appreciated by Gladstone, who not only respected Salisbury as a Churchman but also politically rated him high among colleagues. The last note Gladstone wrote with his own hand was addressed to Lady Salisbury to inquire about a carriage accident in which her husband was involved. His management of foreign affairs, although not free from criticism, secured general confidence. In alarms and anxieties he kept a cool head and took a long view.

"We put all our money on the wrong horse," Salisbury confessed, in glancing back at our attitude to Turkey and Russia before the Crimean War. I recall that phrase as an indication of his fearless candour and openness of mind.

Some of the commotions in his time fill pages in my diary. There was friction with Russia and Germany. Their seizure of Pacific footholds in China caused jealous alarm, not altogether relieved by our own lease of Wei-hai-wei.

French rivalry embarrassed us in many quarters. It led us to define our interests, for instance, in the Upper Nile, and when we were reconquering the Sudan in 1898 much excitement was caused by Major Marchand's hoisting of the French flag at Fashoda. An extremely delicate and dangerous situation was got over by Salisbury's tactfully firm communication with Paris and Kitchener's considerate personal treatment of the adventurous Frenchman who had marched across Africa and found himself stranded at Fashoda in an untenable position. The French flag was soon hauled down.

Balfour was an accomplished leader of the House of Commons. Though often strangely detached in manner, his intellectual distinction and dialectic art atoned for the "indolent attention" to detail, with which he was reproached by a cousin. He was one of the most fascinating men that the House has known. His smile could do what one hundred speeches from another might not do.

I knew no one else who could with equal suavity hit an opponent a stinging blow and explain afterwards that he did not mean to be hurtful. By dull followers he was bored, and for rebels in his party he had no mercy, but its members, as a rule, regarded him with affection. This was shown by their reference to him in the Lobby by his Christian name. There was the same sign of friendly intimacy in opponents of his own social class. I heard Harcourt whispering "Arthur" across the table.

As Balfour stood at the table, grasping the lapels of his coat, the tall, elegant figure, the refined face and massive head made a pleasing picture. For debate he seldom prepared his speeches. He made a few notes on a long envelope with a fountain pen, seizing on the weak point in an opponent's armour. When seated he usually reclined on his back with his feet against the table. He contrived to write letters in that attitude. He did not wear his hat in the House, even in the days when most other members kept to the old fashion.

Office had no attraction for the Duke of Devonshire, known to everyone as *the Duke*, but the Coalition would not have been complete without the Liberal Unionist chief, and he served modestly and faithfully under the Prime Minister who had twice offered to hand over to him the highest place. He occupied the position of Lord President of the Council with Sir John Gorst as his colleague in the Education Department. Gorst retained the contempt for "mandarins" which he displayed in the Fourth Party, but got on well with the Duke of Devonshire.

There was little conversation between the Prime Minister and the Duke as they sat side by side in the House of Lords. They had few interests in common and one of the few was *not* denominational education, a subject on which the Cecils felt strongly.

I heard in the Lobby the story, so characteristic of the Duke, told by his biographer, Bernard Holland. It fell to the Duke to break to Gorst the news that the Cabinet had decided to drop the Education Bill to which his colleague was attached.

He went to Sir John's room and after standing some time with his back to the fire said: "Well, Gorst, your damned Bill's dead."

Hicks Beach, to whom Goschen made way at the Exchequer, was a squire of decided character and first-class political ability, trusted if not loved by the Conservative party and respected by the whole House. He was at more than one crisis looked on as a Prime Minister in reserve. "Black Michael" he was called long after his beard justified the title for the statesman with the austere face and the tongue that was a terror to pretentious busybodies. Though he had not an inviting manner he was a good House of Commons man, fair-minded, straight-forward and persuasive. His character was expressed in his clear, unadorned, forcible speech.

I recall how in opening a Budget Sir Michael raised to his lips a glass of liquor and archly asked "who drinks rum?" As he had been talking about the consumption of rum I wondered if he was pretending to sample it. His Parliamentary Private Secretary, Sir Arthur Griffith-Boscawen, revealed in *Fourteen Years in Parliament* that the liquor in the glass was port. Usually Sir Michael brought his own port in a flask, but on this occasion he forgot it, and his Secretary got some at the refreshment bar—a light wine from the wood, of a tawny hue.

"Splendid isolation" was a phrase made current by Goschen, who quoted it from Foster, a Canadian statesman, when we had many enemies and no powerful friends in Europe. Goschen returned at his own wish in 1895 to the office of First Lord of the Admiralty, which he occupied more than twenty years previously in Gladstone's first Government. He commissioned a Flying Squadron after the Kaiser sent the notorious telegram to Kruger, congratulating him on having repelled the Jameson Raid without appealing for the help of friendly Powers. The suggestion that Germany might have intervened roused the wrath of the British people, and Goschen's prompt action proved our Naval supremacy in our "splendid isolation."

Those whom I have mentioned are typical of our statesmen at the end of the Victorian epoch. I doubt if any of us then thought it possible that the chief place in the state might be reached within measurable time by men of the middle class. With the exception of Joseph Chamberlain, the leading figures came from privileged strata.

Chamberlain obtained an ascendancy equal to that of a Prime Minister. Important as was his own office his restless mind could not be confined within a department, any more now than when he was at the Board of Trade in the Liberal Government. He invaded other realms, including Salisbury's special domain.

Open diplomacy has been demanded by democratic politicians in recent times. It was adopted forty years ago by Joseph Chamberlain. Opponents rebuked him for conducting openly, before the whole world, his negotiations with the Transvaal Government. He imported also a style of his own into the sphere of foreign affairs.

In that sphere he added to the piquant phrases which clung to his memory. When distrust of Russia was increased by her method of grasping Port Arthur, Chamberlain endorsed the proverb that "who sups with the devil must have a long spoon." With equal bluntness he called on the irritating French to mend their manners. He "touted" (in Asquith's critical word) for an alliance between the Teutonic race and the two great branches of the Anglo-Saxon peoples. After encouraging Chamberlain to put forward the idea of an alliance with Germany, Bismarck gave way to the Anglophobes and threw him over in the Reichstag. When

Bülow rebuked him for disparaging reflections on German methods of warfare compared with the British, he delighted the whole country with the rejoinder: "What I have said, I have said."

If the Prime Minister was as annoyed as colleagues were by the Colonial Secretary's inroad into the international sphere he did not reveal his feeling. He dealt circumspectly with Opposition challenges on the delicate subject. Chamberlain was too powerful to be repudiated or rebuked.

His influence contributed to the chapter of social services which was opened by the Workmen's Compensation Act of 1897. The beneficent scheme, applying to a limited number of occupations, laid the foundation of a great structure.

Gerald Balfour, who had the same philosophic cast of mind as his brother, but who lacked Arthur's pungency and looked as melancholy as Jaques, made a praiseworthy but vain effort at the Irish Office to kill Home Rule "with kindness." It used to be said that Dr. Thompson, the Master of Trinity, had him in view at a college meeting in the famous epigram, "We are none of us infallible, not even the youngest among us." Gerald seemed more fitted to be a Fellow of Trinity than to hold an exacting political office, but he was a hard worker and modest in demeanour and his speeches gave evidence of thought.

Liberals have at various periods shown a disposition to disagree among themselves. It would have been well for the fortunes of the party if they had followed the advice given by Captain Sinclair (Lord Pentland) when he was a Whip. *In necessariis unitas; in non necessariis libertas; in omnibus caritas.*<sup>1</sup> But though their capacity for disagreement had unfortunate results in their party career it sprang, as they boasted, from the right of individual conscience. At this stage they were united in criticism of Chamberlain's dispatches to Kruger, demanding redress of the grievances of the British in the Transvaal, but they differed on policy and their difference became acute.

Harcourt resigned in 1898 the leadership of the party when it was rent by sectional disputes. Campbell-Bannerman succeeded him—it was supposed as a stop-gap! Harcourt and Morley, now at one in anti-Imperialism, sat aloof from the Liberal leader at the gangway end of the front Opposition bench, and on the other side of "C.-B." who was "anti-Joe" but not a pro-Boer, were Asquith and Grey, the Imperialists, who supported the Government once war was made inevitable by Kruger's ultimatum.

The terms "Little England" and "Liberal Imperialist" ("Liberal Imp." for short) were tossed across the political arena. Morley denied that he was a little Englander "I am," he said, "an Old Englander and Old England knew very well what she was about." Liberal Imperialism he described as Chamberlain wine with a Rosebery label. Asquith, in his more prosaic way, defined the true Imperialist as "the man who believes in such expansion only as carries with it advantages not out of proportion to its obligations."

<sup>1</sup> There was some discussion as to the origin of that saying. It was attributed commonly to St. Augustine, but when that attribution was questioned by scholars whom I consulted I was advised to try Dr. Gore. In reply to my enquiry Dr. Gore said he had attributed it to St. Augustine in a sermon, but was subsequently informed that the author was Rupertus Meldenius, a Protestant, who wrote in 1620-1640.

Rosebery, whom the "Imps" still regarded as the Liberal party leader, became the Orator of Country and Empire. Audiences looked with emotion at the figure always attired in black since his wife's death in 1890. They were fascinated not only by his voice but also by his face. Someone has written of his "unseeing" look. Seated near him at a small gathering I was tantalised by the unmoving face, with the beautiful eyes. Whether he was speaking or silent, whether witty or grave, its mask never changed. As J. M. Barrie says of one of "The Edinburgh Eleven," you could not tell from his face what was going on inside.

An inscrutable, incalculable man! One never knew what he might do or say. Sometimes he would converse freely with a friend; next time he would turn away from him suddenly. He did not suffer mediocrities gladly. Nor did he enjoy the company of the "blue-book-and-biscuit" politician.

The "Khaki Election" of 1900, held when Lord Roberts proclaimed the annexation of the Transvaal, and the war was (prematurely) declared to be practically over, raised a furious storm. Liberals united in protesting against advantage being taken of patriotic feeling for political purposes. The Duke of Devonshire pleaded that it was as fair for a party leader to take an Election at a moment not unfavourable to his own side as it was for a cricket captain, on winning the toss, to put his own side or his adversaries in to bat. That is a political practice familiar to every generation, but rarely avowed so plainly.

Resentment at the Khaki Election was increased by Chamberlain's slogan. As placarded and repeated by Unionist candidates it ran: "a seat lost to the Government is a seat sold to the Boers." In the form in which it was written, as the facsimile proved, it declared that a seat lost to the Government is a seat "gained" to the Boers. "Sold" instead of "gained" was a telegraphic error. But the correction when made could not overtake the original wording, and even as corrected the slogan was repugnant to Liberals.

At the opening of the new century the older generation of statesmen gradually receded. Familiar veterans, among them Goschen, who went to the House of Lords, retired from office when the Khaki Election gave the Unionists a new lease of power. Salisbury lingered a little longer, with the title of Lord Privy Seal, but entrusted the Foreign Office to the Marquis of Lansdowne. Two future Prime Ministers, Bonar Law and Winston Churchill, began at this time their Parliamentary careers.

"The Hotel Cecil, Unlimited" was the title given by a Tory cynic to the reconstructed Government. Along with Salisbury in the Cabinet were his nephews Arthur Balfour and Gerald Balfour, and his son-in-law, Lord Selborne. His son, Lord Cranborne, entered office as Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs.

Quizzing members for a generation recalled the Under-Secretary's patriotic brag. When the Anglo-Japanese Entente of 1902 was signed, Cranborne, replying to Dilke's comment that we might have secured it earlier, said: "It is not for us to seek treaties; we grant them." He forgot Chamberlain's search for alliances!

I recall at the mention of Lord Selborne a picturesque incident at the close of his career in the House of Commons, before he entered office. "I have to call your attention to the presence in the House of a nobleman," said Labouchere to the Speaker one afternoon in 1895, Lord Selborne's father had died, but the new peer was in his old place where he had sat as Lord Wolmer on the green benches.

Although he had become a peer of the realm he held that he was not a Lord of Parliament as he had not applied for a writ of summons to the Upper House. His claim to remain among the Commons was supported by Curzon and Brodrick, who foresaw their own fate, but a Committee decided against it and the doors of the representative Chamber were closed against him.

Queen Victoria's last speech from the throne after the Khaki Election, read in her absence by the Lord Chancellor, consisted of only three sentences. The Speaker of the House of Commons was on his way back to his own place before the tail of the procession of members had reached the House of Lords.

A new Sovereign gave *éclat* to the new century. There was an unexampled crush at the first opening of Parliament by King Edward. The last occasion on which it was opened by Queen Victoria in person was in 1886 during Lord Salisbury's first Ministry, and exceptional interest was taken in the royal ceremony in 1901, not only because of its rarity but also because few living persons had seen a King on the Throne. I have been at many similar ceremonies but never felt such a thrill as when I saw King Edward leading beautiful Queen Alexandra by the hand.

Over 400 members of the House of Commons followed the Speaker in an attempt to get into the House of Lords, where the accommodation for them was hopelessly inadequate. In the crush an ex-Cabinet Minister, Henry Fowler, failed to get admission and another member, Tritton, was severely injured. Inquiry into the accommodation was made by a Committee, and since then much more room has been reserved for the Commons.

For the first time in the history of the House of Commons police were in 1901 brought within its doors. A dozen Nationalists, resenting the closure, refused to leave their seats, as members under the old and since abandoned rule were required to do, when a division was called. On being suspended they disregarded the Speaker's appeal to withdraw from the House, and compulsion was necessary. A formal tap on the shoulder by the Serjeant-at-Arms has been usually accepted in similar circumstances as a sufficient demonstration of force. On this occasion the Serjeant failed to induce the Irishmen to leave and the messengers of the House were unable to remove them. Thereupon Mr. Speaker Gully called in the police. Resisting members were borne struggling from their seats, some of them dragged over the tops of benches.

The scene was a shock to the dignity and traditional privacy of the House. It was pained by the spectacle of members, however refractory, carried out by police. My old friend and Gallery colleague, Michael MacDonagh, in his book on the Speakers of the House, says that the moral authority of Gully was never the same again. Apologists have asked what other course he could have taken. The Standing Order by which in the case of grave disorder the Speaker adjourns the House or suspends the sitting had not then been passed; but it has been suggested that, taking, like Speaker Brand, a bold initiative, Gully might have adjourned it on his own responsibility.

While "a sort of war" in Lord Chancellor Halsbury's phrase, dragged on in South Africa, feeling was inflamed by Campbell-Bannerman's charge against the Government of "methods of barbarism." This charge he made with reference to

"the erection of block-houses to check the guerilla tactics of the Boers and the removal of their dependants to concentration camps. The phrase was deplored by many of C.-B.'s own friends.

On the question of policy the differences in the Liberal party between the Imperialists who formed the Liberal League and the anti-Imperialist section were exhibited by rival dinner gatherings. They carried their own war, as Henry Lucy said, to "the knife and fork."

Lloyd George, already a first-rate Parliamentary gladiator and a platform orator, became notorious by the vehemence and pertinacity of his attacks on the Government's war policy and methods. He came into sharp conflict with Chamberlain. On one occasion Chamberlain remarked to the House: "You will now hear the truth." "For the first time from you," Lloyd George muttered. "Cad!" exclaimed Chamberlain.

The rising young Radical had earlier revealed his powers in criticism of domestic measures and had received avuncular advice from Harcourt to prepare for a responsible position. Prudent men thought he was risking his political future by his passionate crusade in and out of Parliament against the war. He risked his life by carrying the crusade to the Chamberlain citadel. In the Town Hall of Birmingham he confronted a noisy, hostile audience and the crowd outside was so threatening that the Chief Constable, anxious for his safety, persuaded him to leave in a police officer's uniform.

Rosebery, whose attitude and intentions in political life Campbell-Bannerman tried to ascertain, shrouded himself in epigrams and aphorisms. "I must," he declared, "plough my furrow alone but before I get to the end of that furrow I may find myself not alone." He made brilliant sallies and then went out of sight. Extraordinary interest was aroused when he emerged from a long retreat in 1901 to address a meeting at Chesterfield, but his advice to Liberals to "clean their slate" did not rally them to his flag. Campbell-Bannerman condemned the "clean slate" policy.

"Some of the greatest peaces in the world's history," Rosebery remarked, "have begun with an apparently casual meeting of two travellers in a neutral area." The cryptic remark excited much speculation, and it was conjectured that Rosebery imagined a meeting of Boer and Britain on neutral ground in Holland, whither Kruger had fled. That was a fruitless conjecture.

There was profound relief when the news that the war had ended at last came on Sunday, June 1st, 1902. The terms of surrender by the Boers had been negotiated with their Army leaders by Lord Kitchener and Sir Alfred Milner at Vereeniging. Sincere as was the rejoicing at the end of the war, the demonstrations were not equal to those caused earlier by the relief of Mafeking.

An era ended when the last of Queen Victoria's Prime Ministers retired. A conspicuous blank was caused by the disappearance of Salisbury's great figure; and with him another familiar Victorian, Hicks Beach, left office. The official kingdom was divided between Balfour and Chamberlain.

Many Conservatives as well as Liberal Unionists would have preferred Chamberlain to Balfour as the new Prime Minister, and had expected that he would be chosen. I heard a great deal of tittle-tattle in the Lobby about Salisbury's procedure. Instead of waiting for the postponed coronation of King Edward, he

resigned within a few weeks of the ceremony. Chamberlain had received a severe wound in the head from a hansom-cab accident while driving down Whitehall, and was confined to his room. Even the Duke of Devonshire was not informed of the change in the Prime Ministership till the eve of its announcement; and as I learn from Lord Askwith's *Life of Lord James of Hereford* the Duke was first told of Balfour's appointment casually, "by the way," at the close of an interview with Balfour on an Education Bill.

I am afraid that Gossips made too much of the incidents of the time. The suspicion that Salisbury took advantage of Chamberlain's disability in order to secure his nephew's appointment was shared by Unionists, who murmured against the Cecilian dynasty. They did not know that King Edward, in sending for Balfour, acted on his own judgment. It was natural that His Majesty should turn to the leader of the House and of the largest party. Chamberlain would not have been ambitious if he were not disappointed, but he promptly and graciously assured the new Prime Minister of his assistance. He was a straight colleague.

Comfort and convenience were sought by the fashionable Parliamentarian in those Edwardian days. The sitting of the House of Commons was suspended in order that members might get home to dinner. By this arrangement also the Speaker had time for a better meal than the traditional "chop." On the other hand, the suspension of the sitting was disliked by back-benchers, who had hitherto had the best chance of being called on in the dull hours when the House was nearly empty.

Another social change was significant of a modern fashion. Hitherto the short sitting had been on Wednesday. The break in the middle of the week was deemed desirable for hard-worked Ministers and officials. Now the week-enders got their way, Friday became the early closing day, so that members might have a longer week-end in the country.

## CHAPTER VII

### BOMB FROM BIRMINGHAM

*Balfour's Open Mind—Chamberlain's Resignation—"Scratch Crew on a Raft"—Raging, Tearing Propaganda—A half-sheet of notepaper—The Dogger Bank incident—Winston Churchill's Début—"Randy Over Again"—"C.-B." and Rosebery—"Dark Horse in a Loose Box."*

ONE OF THE ATTRACTIONS OF POLITICAL LIFE TO AN OBSERVER LIES IN ITS VARIABLENESS. The Balfour Government had settled down to the pursuit of its party policy, and its supporters were assured of dinner at a fixed hour in their clubs or homes and of week-ends in the country. But a bolt came from the blue. There was a restless man in the Government who had no sympathy with the chief domestic project on which the Cecils were intent and who was looking ahead to a new adventure. While the Liberals, who had been long at issue with each other, were practically united in fighting Balfour's Education Bill which placed Church schools on the rates, and Nonconformists were offering "passive resistance" to the payment of the rates, the Bill pushed through Parliament by Balfour embarrassed Liberal Unionists.

Chamberlain, hitherto the most active of Parliamentarians, spent little time in the House during its discussion. When present he sat brooding on the Treasury bench.

I wondered what he was thinking about. The suspicion did not arise in my mind that he was contemplating another "Unauthorized Programme." When he returned from a tour in the "illimitable veldt" of South Africa and found politicians discussing voluntary schools and other domestic topics he told the Opposition Whip: "You can burn your leaflets; we are going to talk about something else."

The political world was convulsed by the bomb dropped from Birmingham on a calm May day in 1903 when Chamberlain advocated preferential tariffs within the Empire involving retaliatory duties against foreign countries. It transpired that there had been conflicts on the subject in the Cabinet. Hicks Beach imposed a shilling duty on imported corn for Revenue purposes; Ritchie, who succeeded him as Chancellor of the Exchequer, took the duty off although—or because—Chamberlain wanted to use it as the basis of Imperial Preference. Foiled in the Cabinet, Chamberlain disclosed his project to the country.

"He cannot mean it," bewildered Free Traders said in the Lobby. He showed when the subject was raised in the House that he did mean it and that he boldly faced its implications. Every constituency was placarded by Liberals with his frank declaration: "If you are to give a Preference to the Colonies you must put a tax upon food."

"He broke up the Liberal party; now he is to break up the Unionist party": so, men Right and Left said. The Prime Minister had "no settled conviction" on Free Trade, but other Unionist statesmen held by definite principles. Hicks Beach from a back bench in the House of Commons raised his emphatic voice against the Chamberlain doctrine, and Goschen in the House of Lords supplied its opponents with a powerful weapon.

Some statesmen after a busy life in the House of Commons sink in the other House into silent obscurity, or anecdote. Not so Goschen! The spirit of the famous fighter was aroused in protest against "a gamble with the food of the people."

I was in the quadrangle off Downing Street in mid-September when Chamberlain, cool and resolute, smoking a cigar, bounded up the steps of the Foreign Office to attend his last Cabinet meeting. It was a meeting and a parting of colleagues who ranged themselves on different sides. Chamberlain had previously tendered his resignation in order to promote his cause from an independent position but, unaware of that circumstance, the Free Traders, Ritchie, Lord George Hamilton and Lord Balfour of Burleigh, resigned office.

"Nothing," said Rosebery, "like the departure of the Colonial Secretary, pairing off with his principal adversaries in the Cabinet, had been seen since Canning and Lord Castlereagh resigned in order to fight a duel."

The Duke of Devonshire was induced to stay on, but he, too, departed and joined the other Free Traders when Balfour renounced the doctrine that taxation should never be levied except for Revenue purposes. Once more, as in the days of Chamberlain's Radical rush, the Duke performed what he considered the useful function of "a drag on the wheel."

Jeering observers thought it a strange circumstance that Austen Chamberlain, sharing his father's views, should have been appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer by a Prime Minister who had an open mind on the subject. (He had held several other offices.) "Balfour has kept him as a hostage for Joe," was the comment that I heard from many lips.

Scheming, plotting, conferring, gossiping went on among Unionist groups while Balfour with "a scratch crew on a raft" (to quote a Morleyism) contrived to hold an indefinite course, without running on the rocks. I did not find it easy to distinguish the groups. There were, in Goschen's phrase, the Chamberlain "whole hoggers"; there were those who, with Balfour, compromised on bargaining duties; some, like Lord Hugh Cecil (who had lively encounters with Chamberlain), Winston Churchill and Major Seely, were Free Fooders; others were unrepentant, out-and-out Free Traders.

Party passion was aroused on other subjects also. Chinese indentured labour on the Rand, denounced by Liberals as slavery, excited specially strong feeling. When Campbell-Bannerman asked the Prime Minister questions about it and Alfred Lyttelton, the new Colonial Secretary, rose instead of Balfour himself to reply, the clamour was so persistent that the sitting had to be suspended.

I went to the Glasgow meeting at which Chamberlain opened what his Free Trade brother, Arthur, predicted would be "a raging, tearing propaganda." His style was more flamboyant than formerly and I noted in my descriptive article that once or twice, for the first time in my experience, he used a misfitting word. I heard several of his other speeches in the country eloquently exhorting people to "think Imperially," while enlarging the range of his taxation scheme. Asquith, the ablest champion of Free Trade, followed Chamberlain in his tour and replied to him from the platform.

Meantime Balfour taxed the impatience of men anxious to commit him to a precise declaration of his own policy. Challenged to set forth his views on a sheet of notepaper, he proudly compressed them into a half-sheet, but former colleague, could not interpret the document. His attitude was satirised in *Rhyme and Lines* by Wilfrid Lawson, the humorous, teetotal Radical, and Carruthers Gould, the famous political cartoonist:

"I'm not for Free Trade and I'm not for Protection:  
I approve of them both and to both have objection."

For two years he contrived to avoid a direct issue in Parliament. His object, as his friends explained, was to hold on to office until the international work and legislative measures of the Government were completed. The Anglo-French Entente, negotiated by Lansdowne and Delcassé, was welcomed everywhere except by Rosebery, who feared that it might lead to war with Germany. Balfour did a permanent service by founding the Committee of Imperial Defence. His cool judgment was invaluable on the occasion of the Dogger Bank incident when the Russian Fleet on the way to the Far East nervously fired at British fishing vessels. In the tension which ensued a rash word might have precipitated war. The Prime Minister kept temper under control and the stupid blunder of the Russians was disposed of satisfactorily.

But Balfour's prestige suffered irretrievably from his repeated boycotting of discussion on the fiscal issue. He was badgered by Liberals and by the group of able young Conservatives who were opposed to Chamberlain's policy.

Lloyd George was now the most popular, as well as the most trenchant, back-bench fighter in the Liberal party. In his attacks on domestic measures he was reconciled to Liberal Imperialists. Balfour recognised in him the most formidable opponent of the Education Bill. The two men appreciated one another's qualities and personal friendship sprang up between them, but that did not abate their political conflict. From the head of the second bench below the Opposition gangway, with Labouchere, now an old man but still a lively quiz, in front of him, Lloyd George pelted the Government with invective and raillery, flashing out in eloquence and displaying immense vitality in his gestures.

For a magazine article I asked him in an interview in the smoking room at the House for a message to young men. He wrote the message on a slip of paper which I presented to one of his admirers. "Never," he wrote, "shirk either work or difficulties, principles or conclusions."

Winston Churchill, who was defeated by Runciman in Oldham at a by-election in 1899 but captured the seat from the same antagonist at the General Election in 1900, quickly displayed his qualities. "I am, I know," he said in May, 1901, "a very young man, but—." In the "but" there was a Disraelian touch. The very young man had as a soldier or newspaper correspondent, or in the dual capacity, seen war in Cuba, India and the Sudan; he had written books on his campaigns and a novel *Savrola*; he went out to South Africa on the outbreak of war as a correspondent, and after taking part in an armoured train fight he was captured by Botha and interned at Pretoria. He escaped by boarding a goods train in motion. That exploit assisted to command him to the electors when he stood for the second time in Oldham. In the same adventurous spirit he turned from soldiering to politics.

I was reminded of his father when, in addressing the House of Commons, Churchill stooped, thrust his head forward and held his left hand at his side. He twirled on his finger his father's signet ring.

From the first he displayed his remarkable gift of language. The Boers, in the notice offering £25 for his recapture, stated that he "talks through his nose and cannot pronounce the letter 'S' properly." His pronunciation of 'S' as if it were 'Sh' was more conspicuous in those days than later, and so was his occasional slight stammer, but his delivery was always effective. In fact the stammer gave emphasis to the word when it came.

A friendly reception was given to Churchill when he made his maiden speech. "That we may see the father repeated in the son," was Chamberlain's hope. The hope was quickly fulfilled, though not in the way that friends of the Government could have desired. "Randy over again!" a Conservative with a shrug of the shoulders whispered to me when with filial devotion the young man raised the "tattered flag" of retrenchment and economy from the stricken field.

Churchill was distinguished among other critics by his particularly scathing and persistent ridicule of Brodrick's phantom Army Corps, and drew on himself the Prime Minister's wrath and the resentment of docile colleagues by his vigorous protests against the muzzling of the House on the fiscal question. Faithful supporters of the Government interrupted his speeches with their clamour. "Oh! Winnie, Winnie!" they cried. On one occasion when he rose Balfour hurried out and was followed by hundreds of other Conservatives, some of whom stood in the doorway jeering at the young rebel. Four years after he entered the House he crossed the

floor on the Free Trade issue; "the Tory fledgeling" roosted beside the Radical Lloyd George.

"It is probable he will be one day Prime Minister," was a forecast I heard in 1905 from Sir Edward Grey, at a literary Club dinner in Fleet Street. (Fortunately no one foresaw the terrible emergency in which, after many vicissitudes, Parliament and the country called him to that position.)

Balfour's temporizing tactics were watched by Chamberlain, from his seat below the Government gangway, with growing impatience. Chamberlain wanted a General Election. The Government survived several crises but at last, in Campbell-Bannerman's words, it made a "moonlight flitting" in the "murky midnight." (December, 1905.)

It was assumed that Balfour thought the moment propitious because of a statement by Campbell-Bannerman, from which Rosebery dissented. Rosebery depicted "C-B." hoisting in its most pronounced form the flag of Home Rule and emphatically declared that *he* could not serve under that banner.

I have before me the time-soiled letter that I received from an eminent Liberal who wrote that Rosebery's declaration was uncalled for, seeing that "C-B." did not pronounce for any extreme plan of Home Rule but advocated the process of steps and stages. But any misunderstanding on the point was of no immediate importance.

There was no doubt that "C-B." was to be the next Prime Minister. He was the man whom Liberals, as a rule, wanted. Unlike Rosebery, he gave them definite leadership. Rosebery was, in Morley's phrase, "a dark horse in a loose box."

## CHAPTER VIII

### TRIUMPHANT LIBERALS

*"C-B.'s" Decision—Working-man in the Cabinet—The Second Eleven—Labour Party Arrives—Ramsay MacDonald elected—The new men—Joseph Chamberlain's Collapse—"Enough of this Foolery"—Most Brilliant Maiden Speech—Union of South Africa—"Terminological Inexactitude"—Haldane's success—Asquith as Premier—John Morley a Peer—Strongest one-party Government—A Great Parliamentarian—Portrait of Asquith—Contrast with L.G.*

A NEW STAGE IN OUR POLITICAL EVOLUTION DATES FROM THE GENERAL ELECTION IN 1906. Parliament was invigorated by elements which made for rapid progress. Triumphant Liberals got their great opportunity and the Independent Labour party came on the scene. Reforms political and social were boldly and confidently planned.

I was surprised by the rapidity with which a Government, comprising both sections of Liberals, was formed by Campbell-Bannerman. (The King had in "C-B." a congenial Minister, and readily forgave him for forgetting to kiss hands on his appointment.) The Liberal Imperialists thought that as "C-B." was to be Prime Minister one of their own group should have the lead in the Commons and that he himself should go to the House of Lords but, encouraged by his wife,

he determined to remain in the House of Commons. The "Imps" received a due share of the great positions. Asquith, their leader, became Chancellor of the Exchequer. It was difficult to reconcile Grey to the holding by "C-B." of the chief place in the Government and in the Commons, but after some hesitation he acquiesced in the arrangement and went to the Foreign Office.

Older Gladstonians were in the Government, though Harcourt did not live to see it and Spencer was an invalid.

Morley was disappointed, as he often was. He hoped to get the Exchequer, but was "exiled to the Brahmaputra" accepting the India Office which he had declined when offered it by Rosebery. "Bob Reid" (Lord Loreburn), who had been in specially close sympathy with "C-B." was appointed Lord Chancellor. His appointment was the first made by the Prime Minister. It put an end for the time to Haldane's hope of the Woolsack. Haldane carried his ingenious mind to the War Office.

Lloyd George on the Treasury bench excited peculiar interest. How, I wondered, would the high-spirited agitator settle down between the official shafts? No clairvoyant could have foretold that he would remain on the Treasury bench for seventeen years. Everyone anticipated that he would have a place in the Government, but amateur constructors put him in a junior office. There was surprise at his receiving Cabinet rank. There was surprise also at his being appointed to the Board of Trade—a business Department considered inappropriate to the talents of an unmethodical man who did not answer letters.

The working class got a higher place than ever before. Henry Broadhurst, the stonemason, and Thomas Burt, the coalminer, had received subordinate office in Gladstone's Governments, but John Burns was the first manual worker to attain Cabinet rank. Many amusing stories were told about that pungent personality. One of the most enjoyed was that when Campbell-Bannerman offered him the Local Government Board with a seat in the Cabinet he said, "Sir 'Enry, you never did a more popular thing in your life." And popular the appointment was among working men. They were pleased to see in the Cabinet "the man with the red flag," who loudly voiced their interests in public commons and parks. They did not think the less of him because he was imprisoned, along with Cunningham-Graham, for maintaining the right of public meeting on "bloody Sunday" (November, 1887), in Trafalgar Square. And he proved his ability as a leader, along with Ben Tillett, in the London dock strike in 1889, which resulted in the modern Labour movement.

John Burns when receiving a salary of £2,000 and later £5,000 was often twitted with the dictum in his "salad days" that no man was worth more than £500 a year. His retort to Labour Party critics was that he took the Trade Union rate of pay. To the King who chaffed him about his dictum—it was said—he replied: "I was not alluding to supermen, Sir." A loud torrent of words poured from Burns in reply to the Labour Party and Radical critics of his administration. His speeches were self-assertive and vehement, and liberally garnished with literary quotation.

The title "Honest John" was given to Burns as well as to Morley. That was his high title in his Battersea constituency. With his strong, short figure in double-breasted, blue-serge reefer and his challenging dark eye-brows, John Burns was identified by everybody and I doubt if anybody else was so familiar with London. He knew every historic nook. In an often-quoted phrase he described the Thames

as "liquid history." Charles Lamb, writing in *Amicus Redivivus* of a river, used the phrase "liquid artifice." Burn's simile was more graphic.

There was an exceptionally strong "Second Eleven" of Junior Ministers. Campbell-Bannerman was more fortunate than recent Prime Ministers in the material at his command. In his team outside the Cabinet were McKenna, Runciman, Herbert Samuel and Churchill, all of whom had given proof of Parliamentary ability. High expectations of "LouLou" Harcourt also were formed. Sir William Harcourt's son sat in silence for two years while the Liberal party was in Opposition, and made his maiden speech—a clever, caustic speech—from the Treasury bench, in moving the Plural Voting Bill, which was in due course rejected by the Peers.

I was in the National Liberal Club when the General Election returns arrived. The ecstasy of its members has rarely been equalled by party politicians. Liberals in the last twenty years have looked back on that time as a time of bliss. Their gains exceeded their most sanguine forecasts. The Liberals, by themselves, obtained a majority of 88 over all other parties, and with their Irish and Labour allies the Government had a majority over the Unionists of fully 350.

The election of 29 candidates of the Labour Representation Committee, which transformed itself into the independent Labour Party, was the beginning of the most outstanding political movement of the century. Keir Hardie, the first leader of the party, and Arthur Henderson, its principal organiser, were already familiar figures. New members were destined to fill leading roles in the State, notably Ramsay MacDonald, Philip Snowden and Clynes. Besides the Independents there were 24 Labour members, many of them miners and representatives of Trade Unions, who were closely identified with the Liberal party. They were the "Lib-Labs."

I became acquainted with Ramsay MacDonald through another native of Lossiemouth, John E. Sutherland (known in the North as "John E."), the Liberal member for the Elgin Burghs. As Sutherland's guest I went north to the dinner at which the two Lossie "loons" were entertained on their election in their home-town. I kept in touch with MacDonald at Westminster and met him frequently on my autumn holiday on the Moray Firth. He held his head high and was assured in political opinion, but he was always friendly and courteous—and a good partner in a golf foursome.

The old governing groups and country-house rule were shattered by the election. Middle-class men with moderate means, men trained in municipal work and Nonconformists were more numerous than in any former Parliament. Some of them at first did not feel at home, but soon the place was pervaded with their own character. They were earnest, grave, well-informed politicians, intent on the carrying out of their principles.

I have witnessed at Westminster changes in personnel, parties, habits, hours and dress. The pace of change has been quickest since 1906.

The House, less of a fashionable resort and more of a place of business, adjusted its habits to the new temperament. It abolished the dinner interval which was in vogue for a few years. Business must be done, dinner or no dinner! An uninterrupted sitting from 2.45 p.m. became the rule.

The closing hour was made a little more convenient to men who lived a long way from Big Ben and could not afford to drive home. From 1888 opposed business

ceased at midnight and the House rose at one o'clock. By the new rule introduced in 1906 opposed business terminated at eleven o'clock and the House rose at half-past eleven.

I was horrified and saddened when I heard the whispered news of Chamberlain's disablement. Chamberlain led the Opposition while Balfour was without a seat in 1906, and I thought that he might yet be Prime Minister. He attended at Birmingham the celebration of his seventieth birthday and his thirtieth year in Parliament and delivered a vigorous speech. But a few days later he suffered the paralytic stroke from which he never physically recovered.

Though he survived eight years and made his opinion known in political crises he was never seen again in Parliament except when he came after the two elections of 1910 to take the oath. I witnessed with emotion his last visit in February, 1911. He was supported to a seat beside the Speaker's chair, and after the Oath had been read he touched the pen with which Austen signed his famous name on the Roll. For a moment he glanced through the spectacles which he wore, instead of the celebrated monocle, at the once-familiar scene.

To the present day Liberals look back on Campbell-Bannerman as the ideal exponent of their principles, in the Gladstonian tradition. He secured the devotion of his party by his unpretentious and genial, yet resolute, character. Although felicitous in phrase he was not an orator. His speeches were better to read than to hear. He held up the MS. in his hand, and fanned his face with it. For the "big hammer" in debate he turned to Asquith.

Few Prime Ministers have been so easily approached by back-benchers. Many held aloof from the rank-and-file. "C-B." talked to all men in a homely way, with pawky humour. He enjoyed especially the company of fellow-Scots and poked fun at the traits which he shared with them.

He hit off the characters of colleagues. Morley he called Priscilla; and Haldane was Schopenhauer. Another, whose name I was told by one who knew, was *maximus in minimis* but *minimus in maximis*. As Macaulay wrote of Horace Walpole, "The conformation of his mind was such that whatever was little seemed to him great, and whatever was great seemed to him little."

(Snowden said Sir John Simon was thus described by Campbell-Bannerman, but Snowden was in error; Simon was not among "C-B.'s" official colleagues.)

An exceptionally blunt rebuke was given by the Prime Minister to his predecessor. "C-B.'s" patience was tried when Balfour on getting a seat for the City of London resumed his airy dialectics in a fiscal debate. "Enough of this foolery!" "C-B." exclaimed. The words were tremendously applauded, but I gathered that some of his friends thought they were too rude to be applied to a distinguished leader of Opposition, and I was not surprised to read in Spender's biography that "C-B." himself was a little remorseful about the episode.

The most brilliant maiden speech that I ever heard was delivered in that debate F. E. Smith bounded in an hour to the front rank of Parliamentary speakers and controversialists. Leaning forward and talking with a sort of lisp at a rapid rate "F.E." excited the whole House and aroused the Unionists to frenzied enthusiasm by the invective, wit and sarcasm which he flung at the Government and its supporters.

I observed that a note to the orator from Tim Healy was passed along the benches. "F.E." published it in *Contemporary Personalities* when he was the Earl of Birkenhead, and the writer was His Excellency, the Governor of the Irish Free State. "I am old, and you are young," wrote the famous Parliamentary gladiator, "but you have beaten me at my own game."

Even Liberals, affronted by his gibes, could not but admire the brilliance of "F.E.'s" oratorical fireworks. They were the subject of everyone's talk in the Lobby. Every dispassionate listener recognised that here was a young man of extraordinary talent.

"Then felt I like some watcher of the skies  
When a new planet swims into his ken."

The greatest achievement of Campbell-Bannerman's brief period of power was the establishment of self-government in the Transvaal and Orange Free State. It has been aptly said that the Union of South Africa is the best monument to his memory. The transformation, so useful to us in the first Great War, which was brought about by "C.B.'s" policy, became vivid in my sight when in 1909 I saw General Botha on the steps of the throne at the passage of the Union Bill in the House of Lords.

A never-forgotten Churchillian phrase sprang out of the controversy on Chinese indentured labour on the Rand. The system, passionately denounced as slavery by Liberals when in Opposition, could not be abandoned at once, and Churchill, now Under-Secretary for the Colonies, daringly said it could not be classified as slavery in the extreme acceptance of the word without some risk of "terminological inexactitude." When that periphrasis has been used in recent years its author has greeted his youthful essay with a veteran's tolerant smile.

A phrase by the Prime Minister rang round the world. Representatives of the Duma, set up in Russia, attended an inter-Parliamentary meeting and on the day that "C.B." addressed it in the Royal Gallery news came of the Tsar's suspension of the body in which high hopes had been placed. *La Duma est morte, vive la Duma*, he boldly exclaimed. Diplomatic heads were shaken at the words; it was feared that they might give offence to Autocracy. But they did not prevent the Convention in the following year, which relieved our apprehensions of Russian infiltration in Central Asia, and the menace to India.

Haldane was among the Ministers who distinguished themselves in the administrative sphere where much was accomplished. Armchair Colonels sneered at the lawyer and philosopher in the rôle of War Minister, and supercilious politicians wearied of his appeal in long speeches for clear thinking. But he proved the greatest War Minister since Cardwell. The country had reason to be grateful to him for the organisation of the Expeditionary Force and the Territorial Army and the creation of the General Staff.

In legislation the Government was at the mercy of the Peers. A considerable number of measures reached the Statute Book, among them the long-disputed Bill, promoted by private members, to legalize marriage with a deceased wife's sister; and a Bill to qualify women as Councillors or Aldermen in County and Borough Councils; but several important Government Bills, passed by the Commons, were either fatally altered or rejected outright by the House of Lords. In these circumstances the issue bequeathed by Gladstone to his party was taken up, and a

declaratory resolution, founded on John Bright's proposals, for the restriction of the power of the Peers was adopted by the Commons.

Sorrow was felt throughout the land at Campbell-Bannerman's death. He had been a lonely figure since the death of his wife, whom he nursed in her illness, and his health gradually failed. King Edward, whose relations were easier with "C-B." than with his other Prime Ministers, called on him twice while he lay ill in Downing Street. There he died three weeks after he sent his resignation to the Sovereign.

I had no doubt as to who would be the next Prime Minister. One or two of the older Liberals might have been pleased to see Morley in the position and there was some talk of Grey for it. But there was little surprise in any quarter when King Edward, who was at Biarritz, sent for Asquith. Everyone recognised Asquith's intellectual and oratorical power; and it was in his favour, in the view of Liberals, that he had won the confidence and affection of "C-B."

If Morley ever aspired to the highest place his hope of it was now at an end. I don't think that his appointment as Prime Minister at any time would have been generally approved. His prestige in the House of Commons was never equal to his popularity among Gladstonians in the country. He was sensitive and stood aloof from the rank-and-file. In a cartoon he was depicted "Johnny Head-in-Air." A Liberal who sat in the House with him for nearly a quarter of a century told me that they never exchanged a word.

Morley may have thought that on the reconstruction of the Government he was entitled at any rate to the second place. As that did not fall to him he retained the India Office, and to the surprise of his colleagues and everybody else he went at his own wish to the House of Lords.

Soon after his elevation the author of the "jingle" about ending or mending the House of Lords was asked by Will Crooks how he liked being a Lord. "The way of transgressors is hard," he replied. But he looked at ease in the dignified calm of his new life and the Peers, who welcome recruits distinguished in any sphere, showed respect even to one who had declared, "You might as well talk to the House of Lords about land as talk to a butcher about Lent."

Who was to be Chancellor of the Exchequer? That question puzzled the gossips. It was rumoured that Asquith thought of Reginald McKenna for the office. McKenna had the cool, precise, orderly mind which the Prime Minister valued, and he displayed competence in finance as Secretary to the Treasury. It was said that he delighted in mental arithmetic. I could readily believe that he was one of the best bridge-players in London. But he had to wait seven years for the Chancellorship.

Lloyd George's claim to it could not be resisted. He had in office given fresh proof of his strong personality and shown unexpected business qualities as an administrator and negotiator. He had, moreover, endeared himself to Radicals in Parliament and the country.

The Government formed by Asquith was the strongest one-party Government in my sixty years' experience. Veterans retired and younger men were promoted. McKenna, Churchill and Runciman got high office; Herbert Samuel waited a little longer at the Home Office as Under-Secretary to finish work in which he was interested before he entered the Cabinet. Grey's prestige was second only to the Prime Minister's. The Marquis of Crewe, another influential figure on whose judgment Asquith relied, succeeded the aged Marquis of Ripon as leader of the House of Lords.

Asquith was Prime Minister for a longer uninterrupted period than anyone since Lord Liverpool. Peel said, and so said Baldwin, that no man's health would permit him to be Prime Minister for more than five years. A strong constitution and cool temper enabled Asquith to hold the office for nearly nine years under more exacting conditions than Peel contemplated or Baldwin experienced. He was the greatest Parliamentarian since Gladstone. His handling of the House of Commons was easy and sure. There was nothing in peace time that he could not induce it to do. Whatever might be the difficulties of his Government he found a way out of them.

One of his friends said to me in the words of Junius, that he allowed colleagues to play upon the easiness of his temper; but if he held a loose rein he kept the Cabinet together through many crises. A generous chief, he gave colleagues credit for any success in their Departments and took on himself the responsibility for errors. He was free from jealousies and suspicions. His reserved manner was a disadvantage to a party leader in modern times. A Liberal member told me that on returning to the House after an election Asquith passed him in a corridor without a flicker of recognition, whereas Lloyd George hailed him with outstretched arms.

As a speaker, Asquith maintained a high level. He appealed to reason, not to emotion. He did not inflame an audience to passion, but he could convince it. His style was clear and dignified and his voice was finely toned. He set an example which was generally commended, but rarely followed, by his compact conciseness. Few orators have put so much into so little space. He was fastidious in the use of the choice word and measured phrase. He was sparing in gesture. Standing stiffly, he seldom did more in the way of emphasis than to pat the back of his left hand with his right. His speeches, as a rule, were carefully prepared.

I saw in one of his manuscripts how, while listening to an assailant, he introduced an appropriate sentence. There was the same perfection of form in his brief impromptus, and epigrammatic force was seen, for instance, in his swift rejoinder to Balfour: "It is easy to rise above the temptations of to-morrow." He boasted to his Whip one acrimonious afternoon: "over 100 questions and not once caught out." His answers sometimes sounded curt, but he was never discourteous, and never indulged in personalities. Gibes by others were received by him with a shrug or a sniff. Some of his familiar phrases at question time have been repeated by Ministers of all parties, such as "there will be no avoidable delay," "every avenue is being explored," "all relevant matters will be taken into consideration," "we must put our ideas into the common stock." There was characteristic precision in his "if and when" and "unless and until."

No styles of speech differed more than those of Lloyd George and Asquith. "L.G.," one of the most eloquent orators since the days of Bright and Gladstone, played on the emotions of his audience. He could stir it to tears or wrath, or laughter. Some of his best speeches were delivered in Opposition. His style in office became, as a rule, less finished. The editor of the "Official Debates" submitted to a Committee an important speech by Lloyd George in order to illustrate the character of the revision which was undertaken for the record. One under the spell of his oratory might have been surprised by the number of the corrections which were necessary to remove grammatical blemishes. The blemishes in form did not lessen the effect of the speech.

## CHAPTER IX

### CONSTITUTIONAL CRISIS

*The "People's Budget"—Limehouse—"A Figid and Calculated Lie"—What will the Lords Do?—"Damn the Consequences"—Peers Electioneer—Constitutional Conference—Prime Minister Shouted Down—Last Ditchers—Rosebery's "Most Painful Speech"—Parliament Act—A Near Thing—List of Potential Peers.*

FLOYD GEORGE OPENED IN THE LONGEST SPEECH THAT I HAVE HEARD THE FAMOUS 1909 "People's Budget." Much of it he read from large type-written sheets. It occupied five hours, with a half-hour interval (suggested in a whisper by Balfour to Asquith) to enable him to rest. With its mass of detail the speech was one of Lloyd George's few oratorical failures. The object that he had in view, besides meeting heavy Naval expenditure, was to finance the Old Age Pensions, which became by Asquith's last Budget a State obligation, and to provide national insurance for sickness and unemployment. For these purposes the Chancellor "robbed the hen roosts" by increased income tax on the larger incomes, a super-tax, a substantial addition to death duties and to duties on liquor and licensing, a land values tax and a tax on the unearned increment in land.

Violent party and class warfare followed these proposals. Conservatives fought fiercely against them and their author. The land taxes, involving the valuation of land, and the death duties were denounced as spoliation and Socialism, a term of growing terror. A Conservative Whip declared that they repealed the 8th and 10th Commandments!

The storm that they raised was intensified by the Chancellor's language. Limehouse took the place of Billingsgate on account of the speech that he delivered there, with its contrasts between rich and poor and its sallies at ducal landlords. On reading it now one may not see why it should have caused so much fuss. More strident class appeals have failed to disturb national phlegm. But the atmosphere of the time was inflammatory.

Rosebery resigned the Presidency of the Liberal League and with the freedom of a cross-bencher joined in the attack on the Budget. He described his own occasional speeches as "the croakings of a retired raven on a withered branch," but they enlivened the sleepy House of Lords. His voice at one moment descended to a whisper and anon rose to a shout, which their lordships considered bad form. At Glasgow he introduced into the new controversy a ringing phrase when he lamented the Socialist path that the Government was taking: he described it as "the end of all." It was "the negation of faith, of family, of property, of monarchy, of Empire."

I heard that one or two members of the Government disliked Lloyd George's finance. His contemporaries believed that without the Prime Minister's firm support it might never have passed the Cabinet. I am afraid that timid Liberals on the back benches, with a deficient sense of political morality, justified Lord Salisbury's gibe at the Whig as a "person who denounces in private the measures

which in public he supports." But the more that the controversy raged the more enthusiastically the Finance Bill was applauded by the mass of the party and the more popular its author became among the working classes.

A dramatic episode was added to the annals of that stirring time by Alexander Ure, the Lord Advocate, afterwards Lord President of the Court of Session. Ure, a sleepless platform champion of the land taxes, spoke of the risk that under Tariff Reform the money for old-age pensions might not be available, and was accused by Balfour of a "frigid and calculated lie." This accusation was fiercely resented by the Radical agitator. Facing the Conservative leader in the House, he said that "Accusations such as this, couched in language such as this, happily find no parallel in the history of the country since the days when it was open to a man to defend an attack upon his honour with his own right arm." As he made that declaration in a voice charged with emotion he thrust his long arm across the table and pointed at Balfour.

The House does not love histrionics, but it recognised that Ure was sincerely actuated by deep feeling. The Liberals cheered tremendously. Balfour, although indignant at his adversary's language in the country, gave the House his word of honour that he had no personal feeling against Ure.

"What will the Lords do?" I heard that question day after day in the Lobby when the Budget, fought from Spring till November, was in its final stages. Would the Lords dare to interfere with taxation and finance? They were warned by the Prime Minister of the consequences.

Two of the most sagacious Unionist statesmen, the Duke of Devonshire and Lord Goschen, were dead. The Marquis of Lansdowne wielded absolute authority in the House of Lords. A cultured aristocrat, he was suave and dignified in manner, precise in speech, and resolute in opposition to the Government.

On the other side, the Marquis of Crewe was of the same fine mould. He was a match for the Unionist leader in the finesse of debate. His speeches were tantalizingly slow in delivery, while he twisted and rubbed his hands, but after a pause the right word came. Yet nothing that he said influenced the House of Lords. The Liberal force that he led was overwhelmed by Lansdowne's big battalions.

One night after a meeting of Unionist leaders, I happened to meet Lloyd George, and he told me that the Lords were to throw out the Finance Bill. I have before me the four-lined whip immediately issued to the Unionist Peers:

"Most important.

"Your Lordships' attendance in the House of Lords is urgently requested on Monday, November 22nd, and following days.

"On the motion for the Second Reading of the Finance Bill, the Marquess of Lansdowne will move, That this House is not justified in giving its consent to this Bill until it has been submitted to the judgment of the country.

Waldegrave."

The Lords have often excelled the Commons in debate on great subjects. Argument is carried on by a pre-arranged series of speeches by eminent men who calmly put points of view drawn from varied experience. That was the orderly and

weighty manner of the debate on the Finance Bill, imbued though it was by strong feeling. It was followed by groups of Privy Councillors, standing in front of the Throne, by many M.P.s at the Bar, and by Peeresses in the side galleries.

Cautious Peers dreaded the consequences of the rejection of the Bill. They feared that they might be deprived of their Veto on all legislation. Rosebery, although he trounced it, declined to link the fortunes of the Second Chamber with opposition to the Bill. On the other hand, Milner, at Glasgow, sounded the defiant note. Let those who condemned the Budget prevent its passage and "damn the consequences!"

That was done. The Lords defied the Government and the Commons.

The challenge was taken up instantly by Asquith. He spoke with unusual animation, even with passion, in maintaining that the Peers had committed a breach of the Constitution and usurped the rights of the Commons. The issue was submitted to the country in January, 1910.

The addressing by political leaders of public meetings at places with which they were not personally connected was frowned on by Queen Victoria, but the practice grew at the end of her reign and now the motor-car enabled the electioneers to appear on a large number of platforms. Evelyn Cecil (Lord Rockley) had used a car—the first candidate to do so—in East Herts in 1898. There was in the heated Constitutional contest not only abundant use of cars but also an extraordinary display of pictorial posters.

Another feature of the Election was the part taken in it by the Peers. They delivered hundreds of speeches. Their active intervention was excused on the ground that they were on their defence. With the decline of territorial influence there was less necessity for the Sessional Order of the Commons against the interference of Peers in Elections. The Order was in 1910 limited to Lords Lieutenant, and since 1912 it has not been passed in any form.

The Unionists secured practically the same number of seats as the Liberals but with Irish and Labour allies the Government had still an ample majority. The Budget which had been thrown out by the Lords was reintroduced and passed rapidly through both Houses; and the proposals embodied in the Parliament Bill became the next direct issue. Their object was to disable the Lords from touching Money Bills, to secure the passage of other Bills which, although rejected by the Lords, were carried by the Commons in three successive sessions, and to reduce the duration of Parliament from seven to five years.

"Wait and See," the colloquialism so often tauntingly flung at Asquith during the First World War as evidence of a dilly-dally disposition, was used by him in answer to questions in 1910. Every Government claims the right to disclose its plans at its own time. Asquith's phrase merely asserted that right but, sharply used, it rankled in the minds of opponents.

The conference of representatives of the two principal parties, held after the accession of King George, failed to arrive at agreement on the Constitutional question. Disclosures were made at later times of a move by Lloyd George for co-operation in dealing with grave and urgent problems. A Coalition, as one sees now, might have been of great advantage to the country, but I gather from various sources that, though the plan had an encouraging reception from statesmen on both sides and a compromise seemed possible, it was crushed by party bigots.

As the General Election in December, 1910—the second election in a year—left the Government with its majority, the Parliament Bill confronted the House of Lords. To its proposals the Peers put forward as an alternative the reform of the constitution of the Second Chamber, but Asquith informed the Unionist leaders that the Government would, if necessary, advise the King to exercise his prerogative (that was to create an adequate number of Peers) to secure the passage of the Bill in substantially the shape approved by the Commons and that His Majesty would act on that advice.

The most discreditable scene in the House of Commons, since the scuffle of 1893, took place when Asquith rose to justify his action in regard to the King's prerogative. By taunting shouts and the noisy raising of innumerable points of Order bellicose Conservatives, among whom Lord Hugh Cecil and F. E. Smith were conspicuous, prevented the Prime Minister from making his statement. After trying for half an hour to obtain a hearing, he gave up the attempt. Such courtesy had never before been shown to any leader of the House. An apology was sent to Asquith by ashamed members, including one or two of the worst offenders.

Once more the question arose: What would the Lords do? Would they reject the Parliament Bill, at the risk of the creation of scores, perhaps hundreds, of new Peers? At the decisive moment, leading Unionists were divided. Lansdowne advised the Unionist Peers to abstain from voting, and Balfour advised them to follow the Marquis. A group led by Halsbury, who had been Lord Chancellor in several Ministries, determined to fight "to the last ditch," and were encouraged to do so by some of Balfour's own lieutenants in the House of Commons.

As an obdurate disbelief in the creation of new Peers was revealed in debate Morley read a formula, to which the King had given his approval. The formula, listened to with the utmost attention, removed the last doubt about the exercise, if necessary, of His Majesty's prerogative. Still the "Last Ditchers" were unmoved. On the other hand, some of the Unionist "hedgers" determined to avert an upheaval by voting with the Government. They were stigmatised by organisers of resistance as renegades and rats.

Rosebery, at this crisis, ended his career in the House of Lords. In what he described as his last speech there, "and perhaps the most painful" of his life, he announced his intention, although he hated the Parliament Bill, to go into the Government lobby. He had repeatedly tried to promote the reform of the House of Lords and now he saw no prospect of usefulness in it. His friends hoped that he would return to the Chamber, of which he was the most brilliant ornament, and join in its debates, but he never again took part in its proceedings.

From the Gallery I watched the fateful division. To the last there was doubt how it would end. Most of the Conservative Peers remained prudently at home. The majority of those present came to vote for resistance. The issue would depend on the "Hedgers" who voted with the Liberals. The faces of the Ministers revealed the strain they felt as they watched the Contents and Not-contents emerging from the division lobbies.

There was tomb-like silence when the Whips counted the last man. A moment later the crisis was over. It was a near thing. The majority for the Bill was 17. By that majority the necessity for a huge creation of Peers was averted.

Although Right-Wing Conservatives have frequently agitated for the restoration of some of the powers of the Peers in a reformed House of Lords, the Parliament Act remains as passed in August, 1911.

It was my privilege at a later era to assist Asquith in the preparation of his books. I found in a box a list of persons whose names might have been submitted to the King if a creation of Peers became necessary in the Constitutional struggle. It was, Asquith said, the work of "The Master" (the Master of Elibank, the Chief Whip). He himself never believed it would be necessary. I hoped that he would incorporate the interesting collection of names in his *Memoirs and Reflections*, but he laid it aside and I did not see the list again till it was published in the *Life of Lord Oxford*, by J. A. Spender and Cyril Asquith.

## CHAPTER X

### BONAR LAW SURPRISE

*Revolt against Balfour—Rivals for Succession—Agreement on Bonar—Sidney Street Siege—Churchill at the Admiralty—Agadir—Payment of Members—Ramsay MacDonald a Man of Mark—National Health Insurance—Lloyd George's Ordeal—Suffragettes—“Cat and Mouse” Act.*

BALFOUR'S RESIGNATION OF THE CONSERVATIVE LEADERSHIP IN 1911 CAUSED GREAT commotion in Parliament. He had led his party in the House of Commons for twenty years and was unequalled on his side of the House in intellectual power or in the art of debate. Ostensibly he sought relief from the strain imposed by leadership, but he gave no evidence of his need of repose, and Asquith predicted that there were many chapters of his life still to be written by the Pen of History.

Dissensions in his party were the real reason for his resignation. There was dissatisfaction with his attitude on the fiscal question. A compromise had been arranged between Joseph Chamberlain and himself in the *Valentine Letters* of February 14th, 1906, but he was watched with suspicion by the "Confederates"—a secret society, engaged in heresy hunting, Lord Robert Cecil called them—who wished to drive out of the Unionist ranks all who did not accept their full Protectionist policy. Balfour's position was weakened also by the discontent of the Die-hards with his attitude in the Constitutional crisis. "B.M.G." (Balfour must go) became the slogan of a section of Conservatives in Parliament and the Press.

Remarkable that a non-commissioned officer of the Conservative party should have been placed at its head in the House of Commons! Bonar Law had held only junior office in the Unionist Government. There were two candidates of higher rank for the leadership. Walter Long, an affable, voluble country squire, was a shrewd politician, an energetic administrator and a good Parliamentarian, who had given long service to the State and to his party. Austen Chamberlain hitherto called himself a Liberal Unionist, but recently joined the Carlton Club. He had been Chancellor of the Exchequer; he was entirely devoted to political life; he had steadily improved as a debater and had risen in repute as a statesman of grit. Both these candidates had strong backers, and the choice seemed to lie between them. To avoid a party vote they magnanimously agreed to stand aside if someone else were found generally acceptable.

The unanimous election of Bonar Law surprised everyone who was not behind the scenes. Both Walter Long and Austen Chamberlain loyally acquiesced in it, although it was a disappointment to both and, as events proved, barred Austen's way to the Prime Ministership. Goulding (Lord Wargrave), the Chairman of the Tariff Reform League Organisation, and Max Aitken (Lord Beaverbrook) already a forceful politician, were active promoters of Law's nomination. He not only had won the favour of Tariff Reformers by adroitness in the advocacy of their cause, but also had distinguished himself as a party fighter of the most aggressive type.

Some old-fashioned Conservatives were uneasy about the change in the leadership. I heard in the Lobby their prayer: "Lord have mercy upon us and incline our hearts to Bonar Law."

His trenchant, fluent speeches were the more striking because they were delivered without notes. The only aid to memory that he used in controversy was when, in Lord Salisbury's manner, he took from his waistcoat a slip with a quotation damaging to opponents. It has been said that he was too reliant on others, and particularly on Lord Beaverbrook, but I did not trace diffidence in his familiar phrase: "It can mean one thing and one thing only."

When the new leader was appointed, doubts were raised as to the pronunciation of "Bonar." Inquirers were informed by his friends that it should be sounded "Bonner." By that name he was commonly called in the Lobby. "Law" was dropped out.

The Government also was reconstituted. Morley, proud of the Indian reforms in which Lord Minto, the Viceroy, co-operated with him, got relief from administration in the dignified position of Lord President of the Council. Loreburn left the Woolsack and Haldane at last occupied it. Colonel Seely (Lord Mottistone), who crossed from the Conservative to the Liberal side about the same time as Churchill, became the new War Secretary.

I have been asked by a later generation about the "battle of Sidney Street" which took place when Churchill was Home Secretary. Immense excitement was caused by this affair—the siege of armed foreign anarchists who fired powerful automatic pistols at the police from a barricaded house. Horse artillery were brought on the scene to aid the Guards, although they never came into action; and eventually the house was burned down and the bodies of two desperate men were found in the ruins. Churchill was chaffed about his presence on the battlefield as if he found scope there for his military talents, and although he had not interfered in the operations, the badinage was kept up for many a day.

Even official colleagues were surprised in 1911 by Churchill's appointment in place of McKenna as First Lord of the Admiralty. The post which he eagerly accepted and, in fact, desired was offered to him when on a visit to the Prime Minister in Scotland. It was stated that McKenna was transferred to Churchill's former place at the Home Office in order to take charge of the Welsh Disestablishment Bill. There was a better explanation of the change. McKenna's administrative zeal and efficiency were beyond question and in spite of the objections of colleagues who wanted reduction of military expenditure, he had secured at least the number of dreadnoughts which the Admiralty required. But there was an urgent demand in some quarters that strategic plans should receive more attention.

Anyhow, Churchill had a congenial task in creating a War Staff and putting the Fleet into a state of instant and constant readiness for a conflict, if it should break out, with Germany.

An aspect of Lloyd George's character, little known at that time, was revealed by his famous intervention in the Agadir crisis. While negotiations were going on with regard to Morocco, the French Protectorate, Germany, although her interests there were obscure, sent the gunboat *Panther* to Agadir. This was not only a challenge to France, but also a threat to our own interests in the Atlantic. An intimation that we could not dis-interest ourselves in Morocco was ignored in Berlin. In these circumstances Lloyd George, on his own initiative, though with Grey's and Asquith's approval, took the opportunity of the Bankers' dinner at the Mansion House, to declare that Britain could not be treated as if she were of no account.

His speech was read with surprise and general approval at home and indignation in Germany. From an anti-Imperialist Radical with Lloyd George's antecedents the warning had special significance. In Grey's opinion it had much to do with the preservation of peace.

The social spirit spreading in those years was manifested in the legislation. I note among the measures passed between 1908 and 1912 the Coal Mines (Eight Hours) Bill, the Coal Mines (Minimum Wage) Bill, and the Bills for the establishment of Labour Exchanges and the constitution of Trade Boards to regulate wages in sweated industries. The Port of London Authority was another feature of modern reconstruction.

Payment of members of the House of Commons was introduced in 1911. The salary fixed at £400 remained at that figure till a quarter of a century later, when it was raised to £600. Some opponents who thought that payment lowered the dignity of Parliament lived to admit that it was justified by the inadequate private income of many of their colleagues.

Ramsay MacDonald, then the Chairman of the Parliamentary Labour Party, was grudging and condescending in recognition of Liberal service to the working class. There was little sympathy between himself and Asquith. Among prominent Liberals, as he told me, he held by Morley and "Bob Reid."

As long ago as 1912 I wrote in a published article that the young might live to see MacDonald at the head of a Labour Government. With his interest in Parliament from boyhood and his respect for its traditions he quickly mastered the rules and practices of the House. He had a wider acquaintance with international affairs than his colleagues possessed and he had friends in many cultural spheres of life. The metaphysical speeches in which he wandered from the party rut attracted Balfour's attention.

MacDonald made his mark so distinctly that in 1911 he was invited by Haldane to meet the Kaiser at lunch. The I.L.P. protested against his presence in such company, but he maintained that it was the duty of Labour members to train themselves for high office and to acquaint themselves with the rulers of Europe.

Kingsley's Alton Locke and George Eliot's Felix Holt are among the types in Victorian literature of leaders of the working class and champions of the poor. Labour aspirants to Parliamentary fame are depicted in later novels. Then there is

J. M. Barrie's John Shand in *What Every Woman Knows*. Supercilious critics of the Socialist leader said that Shand was drawn partly from Ramsay MacDonald, but intelligent people knew there was no resemblance between the pathetically ridiculous "Scotsman on the make" and the refined, intellectual, sensitive man from Lossiemouth.

I turn again to my diaristic notes of the times when the Liberals had their last great opportunity in office. All parties recognised that social welfare was the care of the State but they seldom agreed on the practical application of the principle.

The National Health Insurance Bill of 1911 redounded, like Old Age Pensions, to the lasting credit of Lloyd George. Unemployment Insurance was introduced at the same time for a few industries. Health Insurance was at first unpopular in many spheres of life. Difficulties arose with the doctors and Friendly Societies and other organisations, and the proposals were ridiculed, specially by the upper classes among political opponents of the Minister. Duchesses protested that they would never "lick stamps." Lloyd George was laughed at for the promise of "rare and refreshing fruit," and for the slogan that the workers would receive 9d. for 4d. The Bill had an arduous passage through the House of Commons and its pilot received a record number of deputations about it. He worked some sixteen hours daily, with the zealous assistance of Charles Masterman, who from his expertness was called "Masterman Ready."

The new leader of the Conservatives exposed himself to Asquith's irony by declining to say either Yes or No, on the question of the third reading of the Bill. "No" would imply opposition to its principles; "Yes" would imply approval of its form. Asquith congratulated Bonar Law on surpassing one of the ablest dialecticians that Parliament had ever produced. Even Balfour had never discovered, except perhaps in the early days of Tariff Reform, a half-way house between Yes and No!

I have never heard any member so loudly booed in the House as Lloyd George. His agitation for a drastic revision of the land system revived in full force the wrath kindled by his notorious Budget. He was denounced as a dangerous revolutionary.

The more extreme of Lloyd George's adversaries in the Press and Parliament hoped to drive him out of public life and found a pretext in his dealings, along with Rufus Isaacs, the Attorney-General, in American Marconi shares. Charges of corruption were brought against the Ministers. In a roving inquiry conducted by a Parliamentary Committee they were subjected to an inquisition into their private affairs and bank books. The report adopted by a majority completely exonerated them not only from corruption or neglect of public duty, but also from any reflection on their honour. The minority report drafted by Lord Robert Cecil accused the Ministers of "grave impropriety," although the gross charges of corruption made by a few periodicals were unanimously rejected.

Similar lines were followed by parties in the House itself. Freed from imputations on their honour, the Ministers admitted that they had been indiscreet—not, Lloyd George observed, because the transaction in question was wrong but because, as he saw now, it lent itself to misconstruction. Balfour, in a temperate comment, dismissed the corruption charges as ridiculous. Bonar Law, while joining in reprobation of these charges, put a harsh construction on points under review. The Conservatives wished to record regret at the conduct of the Ministers, but the House,

by a majority of 346 to 268, adopted a motion acquitting them of acting otherwise than in good faith.

Sympathy was expressed in many quarters with Lloyd George on account of the ordeal to which he had been subjected. He was exposed, he said, to calumnies, slanders, insults and poisoned shafts. His severest censors, by the way, became his closest colleagues and warmest admirers in the First Great War. Rufus Isaacs's unstained personal honour was attested by his appointment as Lord Chief Justice, Ambassador to the United States and Viceroy of India, whose shores the future Marquis of Reading first saw as "ship's boy."

I witnessed many demonstrations in Parliament by the suffragettes. One evening in 1906 there was noisy commotion in the Ladies' Gallery, and on looking up I saw a flag held out, with the inscription "Justice to Women." In 1908 a woman secretary to a member contrived to enter the House. Women had been allowed formerly to peep into the House through the glass panel at the side of the inner door, but the escapade of the invader led to the withdrawal of that privilege. She rushed past the doorkeepers and gesticulating and shouting reached the middle of the floor before she was stopped by messengers and escorted from the precincts. Suffragettes, not only displayed again a banner from the Ladies' Gallery, but chained themselves to the grille. From this lock-up they were with difficulty released. At the same time (October, 1908) a man threw leaflets from the Strangers' Gallery. The result was that both the Galleries were closed to the public till May, 1909, only wives and relatives of members being meanwhile admitted behind the grille.

Exclusion from the building did not prevent women from addressing members. Ingenious suffragettes chartered a steam launch, moored it close to the Terrace on the bank of the Thames, and harangued the members at tea. The House had an exciting moment when a man flung from the reopened Gallery a bag of flour, aiming it at the Prime Minister as he stood at the table. It missed Asquith and burst on the steps of the Chair. Asquith was unperturbed.

Stone-throwing and other physical assaults on Ministers were practised by militant agitators outside. I was playing golf with Ramsay MacDonald at Lossiemouth when I became aware of a commotion caused by two young women. It turned out that they pounced on Asquith, then staying in Moray, while he was trying to hole a putt, but as he has recorded in his *Memoirs and Reflections* they were driven off by his daughter, niblick in hand.

Refusal by imprisoned suffragettes to take food, and the agitation against forcible feeding, led to the introduction of McKenna's "Cat-and-Mouse" Bill, so styled by Pethick-Lawrence, which enabled the Home Secretary to release the prisoners, and to rearrest them without warrant. Neither this nor any other device stopped suffragette activities. They ceased only, and ceased completely, when the First Great War broke out.

One other incident in that agitation comes to my memory. Lansbury was so passionately moved by the imprisonment of the suffragettes that one day at question time he crossed the floor of the House and shook his fist at the Prime Minister. For several minutes he stood close to Asquith, shouting at him. One or two of the Ministers, dreading that their chief might be hit, were ready to intervene. The House was relieved when Lansbury returned to his seat. It was reserved for a later generation to see a Labour occupant of the front Opposition bench crossing to the Government side and slapping a member on the face.

## CHAPTER XI

### CRY OF CIVIL WAR

*Political Passion—Martial Whip—Snap Divisions—Curragh Alarm—Army and Parliament—The Speaker and Bonar Law—Joseph Chamberlain Dead—Rising Men—Unionist Ladies' Boycott—Conference at the Palace.*

I COME TO THE MOST MENACING PERIOD IN OUR MODERN DOMESTIC HISTORY. INTERNAL convulsions shook the country while danger was latent in the international situation. Great Britain was threatened by the expansion of the German Fleet. Haldane's negotiations in Berlin failed to secure an equitable political agreement or a naval arrangement, and Churchill's suggestion of a "Naval Holiday" was derided by the Germans. In these ominous conditions, when an explosion might occur abroad in which we would be involved, strife flared up at home.

Bills for Irish Home Rule and Welsh Disestablishment were pressed forward by the Parliament Act process in three successive sessions. There was a passionate fight on Disestablishment. But Home Rule supplied the dangerously inflammable material. Unionists fiercely resented its being pushed over the heads of the Peers on to the Statute Book. The slogan "Ulster will fight and Ulster will be right," heard first from Lord Randolph Churchill in 1886, was not now regarded by anyone as a mere rhetorical flourish. Ulster's threat of forcible resistance to inclusion in a Parliament in Dublin inflamed debate in the House of Commons, when it was told of the Army organised under Carson's leadership with F. E. Smith as "Galloper," and heard Bonar Law's promise of unrestricted support to the resisters. The Unionist leader's declaration constituted in Asquith's view "a complete grammar of anarchy" and I heard that some of Bonar Law's own front-bench colleagues thought his language dangerous. But Unionists hated the Government as few Governments have been hated. "Artful dodgers" and "tricksters" were among the terms of abuse flung at the Ministers by the new Unionist leader and although some of the Unionists preferred Balfour's dialectic, the "new style" accorded with the temper of the party.

I know of no bellicose whips like those issued by the Opposition in that furious party warfare. Here is one in 1912:

"The Prime Minister will make his usual motion to suspend the illusory eleven o'clock rule. The Government, physically unable to sit up late and mentally incapable of explaining or defending free debate in the House, will move a resolution to guillotine the discussion on the new Standing Order—a combination of guillotine and bowstring."

On a Monday afternoon, arriving late from a week-end resort, I heard tremendous shouting and when I rushed into the Gallery I saw the Unionists standing on their benches and throwing their hats and Order papers high in the air. They were calling on the Ministers to resign and crying to dejected Radicals: "There goes your

• £400 a year." An amendment to the financial resolution essential to the Home Rule Bill had been moved without notice by Sir Frederick Banbury and, after half-an-hour's discussion, carried by a small majority.

Jubilation at the success of this surprise was followed by Unionist fury a day or two later when the Prime Minister moved that the vote of the House in the snap division should be rescinded. Grave and prolonged disorder made it necessary for the Speaker to adjourn the House.

As members were passing out Ronald McNeill, the tall, distinguished bellicose Ulsterman, who had been editor of the *St. James's Gazette*, picked up from the elbow of the Chair a small leather-bound volume of the Standing Orders and flung it at Churchill, cutting him on the forehead. McNeill subsequently apologised, and no personal ill-feeling was left between him and the Minister. The incident had been long forgotten when they served together in office.

The abrupt rescinding of the decision of the House proved impracticable. If persisted in, it would have provoked further disorder. After a conference with the Speaker, a way out of the difficulty more in accordance with the Parliamentary system was found by means of a new financial resolution. By this device honour was satisfied!

Other attempts were made to defeat the Government in snap divisions. A member, after a snap had been tried and the attempt was no longer a secret, gave me a copy of a "private and unofficial" summons to Unionists to muster at 10.55 on an evening in July, 1913.

"Come straight to the Terrace without going upstairs," the summons ran. "It is vital not to mention this to anyone." The object was to steal a march on the Government Whips. It did not succeed. In the division at eleven o'clock the Government majority was reduced to 33, but that was sufficient. The failure of the snap was celebrated by Ministerialists with great cheering, and as the disappointed Unionists walked away the Irish Nationalists, who had probably discovered the plot, cried ironically: "Try again."

A violent political explosion was caused in March, 1914, by the Curragh incident. Cavalry officers, questioned by the Commander-in-Chief in Ireland with regard to the possible outcome of a movement for the protection of arsenals, said they would prefer dismissal to taking part in active operations, which they (erroneously) supposed were contemplated by the Government, against Ulster. Rumours of their resignation fell into inflammable political material.

It looked as if civil war were imminent when Unionist leaders sympathised with the political feelings of the officers, and Radicals and Socialists sounded the alarm of "Army *versus* Parliament and the People." While Unionists were suspicious of the military intentions of the Government in Ulster other parties were excited by suspicion of an attempt by Army officers, with Unionist connivance, to impose conditions on the Executive. As Asquith said, in laying down a general principle, if a dispensing power to disregard an injunction of the law were exercised the whole fabric of society would crumble. Those members of the Left Wing who suspected such an attempt in the Curragh affair raised a passionate protest.

A sensational speech was delivered by John Ward, the navvy who was to distinguish himself in the Great War—a man of strong, independent character. He denounced in a vigorous tone the alleged attempt of an aristocratic junta of military men to override the Constitution and warned their sympathisers of the example

that they might set to soldiers in the event of labour disputes. We have now, he declared, to decide whether the people of the country through their representatives in Parliament are to make its laws without interference from King or Army. The reception of John Ward's speech revealed the depth of the feeling that had been stirred. Never was a speech cheered more passionately.

Inquiries proved that there had been a series of misunderstandings at the Curragh. It was made clear on the responsible officers being summoned to London that they were ready to do all that might be required—that was to assist the civil power in the maintenance of law and order. They resumed their posts and the position was regularised by an Army Order, sanctioned by the Cabinet. Colonel Seely, in order that it might not even appear from a step he took—although it was not the case—that he had made a bargain with officers as to the terms of their service, insisted with his sensitive sense of duty on resigning the office of Secretary for War. Asquith, whose attitude throughout the affair was warmly approved by Liberals and Socialists, took over the War Office, declaring "The Army will hear nothing of politics from me, and in return I expect to hear nothing of politics from the Army."

I was startled by an episode at the third reading of the Home Rule Bill in its third successive session. The traditions of the House and the authority of the Chair seemed to be jeopardised by what occurred when the Unionists were holding up the proceedings with their clamour and continuous shouts of "Adjourn." The Speaker, having repeatedly appealed to them for Order, turned to their leader and asked whether the demonstration was being made with his assent and approval. "I would not," Bonar Law replied, "presume to criticise what you consider your duty, but I know mine and that is not to answer any such question."

This retort was loudly applauded by the Unionist party. In other quarters—and perhaps among a section of Law's elder colleagues—the apparent refusal of the leader of His Majesty's Opposition to assist the Chair in the maintenance of order was viewed with concern.

In the Lobby there was grave talk about the unprecedented incident. Everyone wondered how the tension would be relieved. That was done at the next sitting when the debate on the Bill was resumed. The Speaker said he was betrayed into an expression which he ought not to have used. He had no idea of imputing to Bonar Law responsibility for the demonstration which had taken place. Bonar Law, in turn, assured the Speaker not only of the respect but also of the personal regard of every member of the House and undertook always, as far as possible, to support the dignity of the Chair. In winding up the debate he charged the Prime Minister with placing upon the minority in the House a strain which no party could stand.

Two distinguished and attractive members of the Unionist party—George Wyndham and Alfred Lyttelton—died in 1913. Handsome, brilliant George Wyndham was pointed out early in his career as a likely Prime Minister. His official life ended abruptly and prematurely in the office of Chief Secretary for Ireland. He carried through Parliament the beneficent Irish Land Purchase Act, but he made Unionists uneasy by the appointment, as Under-Secretary, of Sir Antony MacDonnell, a successful Indian administrator, who was a Roman Catholic and a Liberal in politics; and eventually in ill-health in 1905 he was driven out by uncom-

promising men, among whom Lord Londonderry and Carson were conspicuous, on account of a scheme by an unofficial Association for devolution in Ireland, with which MacDonnell was associated.

Alfred Lyttelton, famed in the cricket field and regarded with affection at the Bar and in Parliament, had a charming personality. I came under his spell, by the way, in a ding-dong match in the Parliamentary Golf Handicap. I have heard no finer eulogy than that in which Asquith, political opponent and personal friend, said of Lyttelton that he, perhaps, of all men of his generation, came nearest to the mould and ideal of manhood which every English father would like to see his son aspire to, and if possible to attain.

Although Joseph Chamberlain had been long out of public sight, when he died on the eve of the First Great War at the age of 78, all who had sat with him in Parliament recalled with a thrill of emotion his personality and achievements. Chamberlain made a greater mark on political life than any other statesman in my time who did not attain the highest office. The Parliamentary career of his younger son, the future Prime Minister, had not yet begun, but Chamberlain had the gratification of knowing that his elder son, Austen, was one of the most influential lieutenants of the Unionist party and one of the most respected members of the House of Commons.

The Lobby began to speculate on the successor to Asquith. Several names were canvassed. There were Edward Grey, Lloyd George, Churchill and Crewe. One afternoon when I was joining in the speculation with a Government Whip at tea on the Terrace, Herbert Samuel passed along. "He has as good a chance as any," the Whip remarked. That showed the abundance of promising material.

Here is a note I made in January, 1914:

"Churchill's position continues to excite curiosity. His name is in almost every paper every day. Liberals who suspect his views say he has been forcing Naval questions to a crisis in the Cabinet, and there is much speculation as to the likelihood of his returning to, and being taken back by, the Conservatives."

That was a long-distance forecast. As for the succession to Asquith, the question was settled by the War.

The ferment in the Irish cauldron brewed throughout summer. Social relationships were as difficult as in the earlier Home Rule struggles. Unionist ladies would not go to a house where they would be in danger of meeting members of the Government and ceased to invite Liberal friends to dinner. They turned their faces away from the wife of the Prime Minister. These were superficial symptoms of a domestic situation more ominous than for centuries past.

"To-day the cry of Civil War is on the lips of the most responsible and sober-minded of My People," the King said in opening a Conference of British and Irish leaders at Buckingham Palace. I believe Asquith was disposed to include Ramsay MacDonald in the Conference, but the idea was not agreeable to some of his colleagues and the Labour Party was not represented.

While war clouds were gathering abroad the Government tried to obtain agreement at home, by a proposal to entitle any Ulster county to vote itself out of Home Rule for six years. To this proposal Redmond gave reluctant assent, but Unionists insisted on the permanent exclusion of all Ulster. There was discussion at the

Palace on the demarcation of the area to be excluded either temporarily or permanently, but though personally an amicable spirit was displayed by the leading Irish protagonists, Redmond and Dillon on the one side and Carson and Craig (Lord Craigavon) on the other, the Conference ended on July 24 without agreement either in principle or in detail.

Within a few days domestic strife was hushed. The last week of July was the last week of the old familiar world. It has been asserted that Germany in going to war believed that Britain was so divided as to be incapable of national action. If that was her belief it was immediately shattered.

## CHAPTER XII

### FIRST GREAT WAR

*Morley and John Burns Resign—M.P.s Sing in Commons—Lord Kitchener—Shell Shock—Admiralty Quarrel—Coalition—Conservative Veto—Asquith's Tactical Mistake—“The Squire”—Ginger Groups—Conscription Crisis—Kitchener's Death—Augustine Birrell—Sinn Fein.*

THOSE OF US BROUGHT UP IN THE VICTORIAN ERA COULD NOT HAVE IMAGINED SUCH A war as we entered thirty years ago. How would Parliament, with Executive dependent on it, carry on the life-and-death struggle of the nation? While I write we are engaged in a still greater effort, but the first World War forms a chapter of our political annals with its own profound and lasting interest. I shall show how Parliament suffered strains during the course of that struggle but justified its great record. Under the democratic system it drew sustenance and strength from the national spirit, exhibited at the outset in the House of Commons on Monday, August 3, 1914.

No later incident has blurred my memory of Sir Edward Grey's speech. The House was so crowded that for the first time since Gladstone expounded his second Home Rule Bill in 1893 chairs had to be placed along the floor. Feeling was extremely acute as the Foreign Secretary described the situation and the obligations that we had assumed. His speech was in form simple and plain, almost conversational, but so much faith was placed in his character and judgment that his words were convincing.

The temper of the audience, although its silence was seldom broken, became more and more distinct as Grey proceeded, and when he sat down the Government knew that the House would be with it in armed resistance to German aggression. There was no Jingoism, but there was firm, solemn determination.

An outstanding feature of the occasion on which everyone commented was the description of Ireland by Grey as “the one bright spot” in a dreadful situation. Nationalists and Ulstermen, who, till a few days previously, had been engaged in strife, were united in the common cause.

It had been often said that England's difficulty was Ireland's opportunity to assert her national independence. Now the House heard with profound relief and satisfaction John Redmond's eloquent speech, placing his country by the side of

Great Britain and declaring that the Government could withdraw every soldier from Ireland and entrust her defence to her own sons. Unionists, no less heartily than Liberals, joined in the ovation that the Nationalist leader received.

The Labour leader, on the other hand, jarred on the feeling of the House. It heard with sharp resentment Ramsay MacDonald's criticism of Grey's foreign policy and his disbelief that the country or the country's honour was in danger.

I have been told that he did not know that Belgium was being invaded when he entered on the censorious course which made him one of the most unpopular men in Great Britain. The Labour party, with the exception of a small group, took its stand with the Government and MacDonald was replaced as leader by Arthur Henderson.

After a week-end of rumours I was not sure, when the House met on the historic Monday, who were members of the Government and who were not and I looked down on the Treasury bench with anxiety. It was known that a large number of the Ministers were at first against our intervention in the war. Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality swept away the hesitation of most of them. Asquith's patient tactics and influence prevailed; and although five Ministers had tendered their resignation only two—Lord Morley, the *doyen* of the Cabinet, and John Burns—left office. John Burns was the first to go. (In the next five years he conducted half a million Colonial and American soldiers over the Houses of Parliament or Westminster Abbey.)

Encouragement to the Government to stand by France had been offered by the Conservative leaders. The support of all parties being assured, the Liberal Ministers, with Lord Kitchener as their colleague at the War Office, undertook the task of unprecedented magnitude in favourable political conditions.

Discord even now raised its ugly head for a moment. The Government decided that the Home Rule Bill should be placed on the Statute Book, although its operation was to be suspended during the war. The Unionists, indignant at the Bill being kept alive, followed up a fierce protest from their leader by walking out of the House. That sort of demonstration was never impressive except when staged by the Irish, who had the art of the theatre.

There was a scene of a different political character in the House of Lords at the giving of the royal assent to Bills. When the Government of Ireland Act was named and the Clerk of the Parliaments announced "*Le roy le veult*," I was amazed by the cheers of Home Rulers who had crossed from the House of Commons. Never before in my time was there such a breach of etiquette.

Still more picturesque was the scene in the House of Commons at the Prorogation. Patriotic emotion broke conventional bound when the House, led by Will Crooks, the popular Labour member, sang the National Anthem. Not only the members, but also officials, journalists and strangers rose and joined in the demonstration. "God save Ireland," cried a Liberal who had heard the royal assent to Home Rule. "And God save England, too," John Redmond fervently exclaimed.

Although practically united on war policy, the House did not abstain from criticism of the manner in which it was conducted. To have so abstained would have been abnegation of the right and duty of Parliament. In 1915 there was increasing complaint of the Ministerial direction of the war and handling of the domestic questions which arose out of it. Some of the Ministers, and Lloyd George in particular, were, the critics admitted, setting aside every party con-

sideration, but others were charged with peace-time Liberal predilections. This was not the charge of Conservatives alone. A knot of Liberals sniped at the Government.

Anxious members protested against an unnecessary withholding of information. For this reticence Lord Kitchener was partly responsible. Kitchener enjoyed the confidence of the country. He recruited a great Army and showed more prescience than anyone else. But there were disadvantages in a soldier with his military prestige and autocratic methods acting as Secretary of State. While supreme at the War Office "K" did not confide in Cabinet colleagues so freely as Ministers brought up in the Downing Street tradition. It was said that he rarely gave any associate his whole mind and that eventually Asquith was his only friend in the Cabinet.

Rumours of the shortage of high explosive shells agitated the Lobby in the Spring of 1915. I heard that a Parliamentary emissary brought a message about it to various statesmen from the Commander-in-Chief, Sir John French. Reports by a distinguished Military Correspondent caused widespread uneasiness, and in the Lobby we saw signs of a political crisis.

A campaign was opened in the Press, with repercussions in the House of Commons against Kitchener and the Prime Minister. They were charged with neglect of duty and Asquith was further accused of misleading the country by a statement that he made at Newcastle. While enforcing on industry the vital importance of the production of munitions, Asquith denied emphatically that there was immediate dearth at the front. For this denial he had the authority of a talk that Kitchener had with the Commander-in-Chief, but that fact he did not disclose till after the war and, in view of the reports from the front, he was continually reproached with his Newcastle statement.

Although shells did not blow up the Government they gave it such a shock that it could not stand another. The final blow was given by Lord Fisher's hurried resignation on account of differences regarding the Dardanelles operations with his Ministerial chief, Churchill. Public discussion, dangerous to national interests, could only be avoided by the change in the constitution of the Government demanded by Bonar Law. In securing this change he had the co-operation of Lloyd George who was gravely concerned about the prosecution of the war.

Many Members believed that if Asquith had appealed to the House he could have saved his Government. He had to his credit at the moment the success of the negotiations which, in Grey's temporary absence, he concluded for Italy's accession to the cause of the Allies.

But we saw now the end for ever of the Liberal régime. In the Coalition that was formed Conservatives claimed a proportionate share of office and patronage. The principle of Parliamentary independence prevented the Irish Nationalist leader from entering the Government, but the Labour party was represented by Arthur Henderson in the Cabinet and by two or three of his colleagues in minor office.

I was amazed, on receiving the official list, by the absence of the name of Lord Haldane. Asquith gave up his oldest friend because otherwise the Coalition could not have been formed. Although he did great service by organising the Expeditionary Force, there had been a Press campaign against Haldane, chiefly because—with his interest in its philosophy and literature—he was reported to have described Germany

as his "spiritual home." On account of the clamour of Conservatives his dismissal was insisted on by their leader. Some of Law's own friends thought that in yielding to the clamour he was lamentably weak.

As Sir John Simon declined the Woolsack, and preferred to be Home Secretary, Haldane was succeeded as Lord Chancellor by Lord Buckmaster.

Churchill's removal from the Admiralty was another surprise. His retention there was also vetoed by the Conservatives. It was to his credit that the Navy was so well equipped and that every ship in the Grand Fleet was in its station when the war broke out. The First Lord suffered for Lord Fisher's quarrel with him, and I suspect that the Conservatives were only too ready to punish him for pre-war proceedings in Ulster. He had excited distrustful feelings also by activities outside the province of the Admiralty to prolong the defence of Antwerp.

It was agreeable to Churchill that Balfour whom he had taken into his confidence at the Admiralty should be his successor, but it was mortifying to one with his active, suggestive brain to be reduced to the sinecure Duchy of Lancaster and still more six months later to be omitted from the new War Committee. Members smiled, though not unkindly, when they heard that, tired of "well-paid inactivity," he was going as a soldier to the front. On his departure he entrusted his papers to F. E. Smith.

I thought then, and was convinced by events, that Asquith made a tactical mistake in not giving Bonar Law sufficiently high status with the deputy-leadership of the Commons. As Lloyd George carried his vitalising energy to the new Ministry of Munitions, one might have expected that Bonar Law would be Chancellor of the Exchequer. That was said to have been the Prime Minister's first plan, but McKenna was appointed Chancellor until such time as Lloyd George might be free to return to the office, and Bonar Law became Colonial Secretary.

Difficulties might have been avoided if he held a position, as deputy-leader of the House, which would bring him daily and hourly, as was the case in the Second Coalition, into contact with the Prime Minister. Although a straightforward colleague, Law was never on the same terms of intimacy with Asquith as he was with Lloyd George.

Nor was there in the Coalition, as a whole, the cohesion and common sentiment found in a party Government. It was known in the Lobby that Ministers were distrustful of each other and were sharply divided on many questions. The spirit of common loyalty to the Government was at the same time lacking in the House.

Confidence in the Coalition waned. Cabals were revived. A responsible Opposition would have been better than diverse sets of critics, but there was not yet the personnel for it.

As I had followed the career of Henry Chaplin (afterwards Viscount Chaplin) and had been entertained by his imitation of Gladstone's rhetoric, I was delighted when "The Squire," in loose frock coat with handkerchief peeping from the outside pocket, performed some of the time-honoured functions of leader of the Opposition. He was a greater authority on horses than on laws. He used to draw horses on the Orders of the Day. But no one was more familiar with the functions of leader of the Opposition.

So extended was his experience that long after Queen Victoria's reign he used the formula "Her" Majesty's Government. He was courtly in manner and popular in all quarters and he maintained tradition in his new rôle by asking questions about business and making comment on it, but his leadership was purely ceremonial.

Carson displayed a different temper when he resigned the office of Attorney-General on account of the Government's ineffective diplomacy in the Balkans and returned to the front Opposition bench. There he was at home. He excelled as a critic. He became Chairman of a Committee of Conservatives who demanded more driving power in the conduct of the war.

Churchill, after some months in Flanders, reappeared on the Westminster field. The Battalion of Royal Scots Fusiliers, of which he had been in command, was disbanded through lack of men, and he was accorded leave to return to Parliament. This was, after all, his proper sphere. Here he played a stimulating part. His criticism, as Kitchener told members of Parliament, was constructive and not destructive. That could not be said of every critic.

Doubts and disputes about the conduct of the war, and rumours of Cabinet disagreement tainted the Parliamentary atmosphere at the close of 1915. "Ginger Groups," both Liberal and Conservative, were busily engaged. Everyone recognised that everything possible was being done by Lloyd George's terrific drive at the Ministry of Munitions. Agitation turned to the question of man power.

Henry Dalziel, a journalist, was the most persistent of the Liberal critics. When I knew him first he represented a Scottish newspaper in the Press Gallery. I was surprised one day in 1892 when he told me he was to stand at the by-election for Kirkcaldy. Dalziel bounded into the seat and showed a flair for Parliamentary activities. By turn, Knight, Baronet and Peer, he became an ardent lieutenant of Lloyd George and a newspaper magnate.

On the question of compulsory service I heard of divided opinion in the Government. The requirements of Industry and Finance had to be considered as well as the requirements of the Army. Popular sentiment also had to be considered. Asquith laid down that for conscription there must be general consent, and Bonar Law admitted that it would be dearly bought if it divided the nation. The time came when military necessities demanded it.

The voluntary system was abandoned when Lord Derby's scheme of attestation failed to provide a sufficient number of recruits. The principle of compulsion was adopted by the Bill of January, 1916. It led to the resignation of Sir John Simon. Arthur Henderson, on the other hand, vigorously defended it in debate; he read his speech from large sheets of paper with a loud, emphatic voice.

Still the necessities of the Army were unsatisfied. The Bill was tentative in character and with its reservations it caused disappointment. A new crisis blew up. Demands for general and immediate conscription revived the differences in Downing Street. The break-up of the Government was expected.

There was a feverish week of Cabinet Councils, Cabinet Committees, War Committees, consultations of Ministers with the Military Chiefs. There were resignation rumours, agitations of groups of M.P.s, airs of mystery on the faces of the Whips. It was said that while some Ministers continued to urge the man-

power claims of the Home Front, Lloyd George pressed for an extension of military compulsion, and gossips asked who would accompany him if he came out of the Government.

Secret Sessions on two days in April (1916)—an unfamiliar procedure at that time—were a symptom of the Parliamentary uneasiness. Members went away for a brief Recess, with fears of national disunion, a General Election, and a succession of unstable Governments.

Suddenly the sky cleared. Hesitation ended, with the production of a new Bill, making all men between 18 and 41, married or single, liable to compulsory enlistment. Only thirty-five members voted against its last stage. As Lord Kitchener, who was formerly against compulsion, said on the eve of his departure on his tragic voyage, it came at the right time and in the right way as a military necessity.

I have rarely seen such sadness—such stupefaction—on the faces of all sorts of people as when the news came of Kitchener's death. It was in the national view a national calamity and the sense of tragedy was accentuated when we heard that his ship was sunk by an enemy mine on his setting out for Russia (where he was to link up her plans with those of the Western powers). Whatever official colleagues may have thought of Kitchener as a Minister he had continued to be the most trusted and popular figure in the country. No one could fill his place in public estimation. But there was widespread relief when Lloyd George agreed to go to the War Office.

Lloyd George's position and ambition were at this time exciting keen, personal feeling. Unsympathetic politicians suspected his attitude to the Prime Minister. Others placed in him increasing hope. All appreciated his energy. Although military men distrusted "L.G." because he had views of his own on strategy, it was felt not only by the circle of devoted friends, who encouraged him, but also by a vast number of others that he would be able at the War Office to give greater impetus to the conduct of the war. In another sphere also his service was utilised.

Since John Bright parted from Gladstone I have never seen a retirement of a Minister so regretful and affectionate as when Augustine Birrell, the Irish Secretary for nine years, parted from Asquith. Parliament was shocked at Easter, 1916, by the Sinn Fein rising, and Birrell was blamed for failing earlier to scotch the rebellious movement. Everyone loved the author of *Obiter dicta*, and enjoyed the lively, witty "birrelling" of his speeches. Though resignation was inevitable there was sympathy with his plea that he had subordinated every consideration to the desire to maintain a common Irish front in the War. It was known also that he had been influenced by the Nationalist leaders who, clinging to the hope of unity, were opposed to repressive action.

It was said that the movement from constitutional Nationalism to the Sinn Fein policy of complete independence for Ireland had been instigated by the suspension of Home Rule and by War Office disregard of Irish sentiment in recruiting. An effort was undertaken by Lloyd George, at the unanimous request of the Cabinet, to seek a solution of the Irish problem. Hopeful progress was made and a scheme was agreed on by the Carsonites and the Redmondites, but when it seemed on the eve of adoption it was wrecked by champions of the Southern Ireland Unionists. Lord Selborne resigned in protest against it; Lansdowne and Walter Long raised difficulties; and although Bonar Law and Balfour had been favourable the scheme fell to the ground. Once more a golden opportunity was lost.

## CHAPTER XIII

### ASQUITH OVERTHROWN

*"Wait and See"* Taunt—Conservative Ministers—A Curious Resolution—“L.G.” Premier—War Cabinet—Constitutional Novelty—Bonar Law Leader of Commons—Downing Street Breakfasts—The Door Mat—Churchill In and Carson Out—Jobs for Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain—Willie Redmond—A Daring Innovation.

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DISCONTENTS AND DISQUIETUDES ABOUT THE WAR DID NOT CEASE WITH THE ADOPTION of conscription. There were increasing complaints by the Ginger Groups of procrastination and indecision in the Government. The taunt of “Wait and See,” which came down from peace-time controversy, was incessantly thrown at the Prime Minister. Bonar Law told a friend that no man could make up his mind more firmly than Asquith when the time for decision had in his judgment come, but he was charged with a love of middle courses and compromises in a divided Cabinet and this it was contended delayed action. Lloyd George with his “do it now” temper, was regarded by critics of the Asquith régime as the man specially qualified for leadership.

Bonar Law’s position was affected by discontent in his own party. He was embarrassed by the support that Carson’s attacks on the Government received from Conservatives. In the division on a question about enemy properties in Nigeria, although he was the Minister directly concerned and treated it as one of confidence in the Government, a substantial section of his party gave a hostile vote.

Though more slowly than Lloyd George, Bonar Law came to the conviction that the war could not be conducted efficiently by the existing Ministerial methods. Thenceforth the two men, along with Carson, joined in a common purpose.

The overthrow of Asquith in December, 1916, was warmly resented by the official Liberal Party. It left a bitter feeling against Lloyd George, which was never completely assuaged, and caused a rift in the party which was deepened by subsequent events.

Lloyd George, in order to quicken Government action, proposed that a small War Committee, with practically absolute powers, should be set up. The names that he suggested were Bonar Law, Carson and Henderson along with himself. It became known that “L.G.” would not remain in the Government unless the war machinery was drastically overhauled. Week-end consultations with Asquith gave promise of agreement, but the promise was short-lived.

The course of the crisis was hastened by the Conservative Ministers. All, except Balfour who was laid up and Lansdowne who was at his country seat, met at Bonar Law’s house on a Sunday and adopted a resolution declaring that a change in the Government was necessary and that the publicity given to Lloyd George’s intentions made reconstruction from within no longer possible. They therefore urged the Prime Minister to tender the resignation of the Government; otherwise they would themselves resign. Bonar Law, in conveying their message to Asquith, did not show him this curiously composite resolution; and Austen Chamberlain, as

stated in his *Life and Letters*, by Sir Charles Petrie, always maintained that Law blundered rather badly in leaving Asquith with the impression that he had suddenly been deserted by his Conservative colleagues, possibly in collusion with Lloyd George.

I gathered from gossip that all the Conservative Ministers had not the same object as their leader. Some of them disliked the tactics for Asquith's deposition and had no wish to put Lloyd George in his place. Friendly personal communications led Asquith to believe—wrongly, as it turned out—that he might rely on the continued support of a group of the Conservative Ministers if he were to go on without Law or Lloyd George.

With grim composure he informed the House of the intended reconstruction of the Government. The announcement, abruptly made, brought the surprised House into the crisis. There was excited speculation and busy manoeuvring in the Lobby. One section of members predicted that Asquith would be able, as in the previous crisis, to carry out the reconstruction himself; another section declared that course to be impracticable seeing that confidence in him had been shaken. The next we heard (on the following day) was that he had resigned.

Although Asquith had provisionally agreed with Lloyd George on the status and functions of the proposed Committee he finally rejected the project on account of the personnel (to which some Conservatives also objected) and the position assigned to himself. He gathered from the Northcliffe Press which was well informed about the movement that, although he was to retain the Prime Ministership, the supreme control of the War was to be handed over to Lloyd George. That arrangement he rejected. He refused to be relegated to the position of a figure-head.

The crisis then reached the culminating stage. As Lloyd George, in the event of his proposal being rejected, was to leave office and carry his campaign into the country, and as Asquith found that the support of Conservative colleagues could not be relied on, he felt compelled to resign the Prime Ministership which he held for nearly nine years.

We had only a day or two to wait—anxious days they were—for a Government under a new head. Was it to be Bonar Law or Lloyd George? Bonar Law, on being sent for by the King, ascertained that Lloyd George was willing to serve under him but as Asquith, whom he next approached and who gathered that he would be dependent on Lloyd George, declined to assist him, he felt unable to form an Administration.

Efforts were made at a conference of leading statesmen at the Palace to secure Asquith's services in a new Government on account of his Parliamentary prestige. The clash of personalities proved intractable. Neither Bonar Law nor Lloyd George would serve under Asquith; and after consulting Liberal colleagues Asquith declined to serve under either.

The arrangement ultimately adopted had been generally anticipated: Lloyd George undertook, with Bonar Law's co-operation, to form a Government.

Would Lloyd George succeed in his task? "I doubt if he will," many gossips said. "If he does form a Government," others said, "it won't last long." He confounded the doubters. Conservative ex-Ministers, including some who had not wished to see him in the chief place, rallied at his side from a sense of public duty. Politicians who had heard that Balfour, as First Lord of the Admiralty,

did not get on smoothly with Lloyd George, were surprised when he accepted the Foreign Office. His adhesion, of course, greatly strengthened the new régime. Others of much less importance assumed that their support was necessary to the carrying on of the King's Government.

Most of Asquith's Liberal colleagues, among them Viscount Grey, the Marquis of Crewe, Runciman and McKenna, backed up their chief, and eleven Liberal members of the former Cabinet received no place in the new Government, but soundings had assured Lloyd George of considerable support in their party. The co-operation of the Labour members, about whom there had been curiosity, also was secured. As the result of an interview with Lloyd George, they got twice the number of offices that they held in the Asquith Coalition.

One distinguished Unionist had no part in the new régime. Lord Lansdowne closed the official career which had run through half a century. It is understood that he had less desire than any other Unionist to depose Asquith. Lloyd George, in turn, must have had less desire for his company on account of the Memorandum which he had submitted to the Cabinet, exploring the question of peace by negotiation. This was practically identical with his celebrated letter to the *Daily Telegraph* in November, 1917.

Supreme power was concentrated in the small War Cabinet, on the model of the Committee designed by Lloyd George. Its personnel was not what he suggested at first. Along with the Prime Minister now were Curzon (instead of Carson), Bonar Law, Milner and Henderson. General Smuts was added six months later. Milner, who had been branded by Lloyd George in the controversies with the Boers as a prancing pro-Consul, had a large share in the achievements of the Government. He proved one of its most useful members.

All the members of the War Cabinet, except Bonar Law, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, were free from departmental duties. The exclusion from the supreme Council of the heads of great departments startled constitutional authorities. They shook their Victorian heads at this departure from the system under which all important Ministers met regularly in Cabinet to determine the policy for which they had collective responsibility and which they were to carry out. But by giving to the super Cabinet the central direction of the war important decisions were quickly taken, and the operation of the new system was facilitated by another innovation, the Cabinet Secretariat.

The devolution of the leadership of the House of Commons on Bonar Law while the Prime Minister was a member of that House appeared to upholders of tradition an anomalous arrangement. Lloyd George was wiser in his generation than Asquith. That arrangement not only relieved the Prime Minister from constant attendance, but also pleased the Conservatives and attached them to the Government.

Conservatives composed the main body of the supporters of the new Coalition. Many migrated from the Opposition side of the House to the Government side.

The Liberal ex-Ministers under Asquith's leadership occupied the front Opposition bench. They assisted in the vigorous prosecution of the war while offering criticism with a full sense of responsibility. There were in the various parties a few independent men who openly displayed dislike of the new régime. The Irish Nationalists were irritated by the spectacle of the two leading opponents of their cause, Bonar Law and Carson, seated on the Treasury bench as the Prime Minister's principal lieutenants.

Lloyd George's dynamic personality inspired confidence, even among many of those who had no affection for him; it kept his colleagues at a high pitch of zeal. Evidence of resource and unflagging energy was seen in the elaborate machinery which was put in operation. The Imperial War Cabinet, containing representatives of the Dominions and India, discussed the wider issues. Half a dozen new Ministries were created. Business men and specialists, without Parliamentary training, were appointed Directors and Controllers of national services.

A social method described to me long afterwards by Lord Alness, who was Secretary for Scotland during six strenuous and memorable years, was devised to bring the Ministers who were outside the War Cabinet into contact with the Premier. Under Lloyd George's Chairmanship Liberal Ministers breakfasted once a week at Capt. Fred Guest's house in Park Lane, and the Conservative Ministers breakfasted at Lord Derby's house in Stratford Place. (Lord Derby succeeded Lloyd George as War Secretary.) The breakfast was a mere excuse for and a prelude to discussion on problems which the Ministers submitted to their chief. Sometimes a member of one party addressed the other group.

Breakfast discussion was a favourite technique in Lloyd George's time in Downing Street. It might be said of Lloyd George, as G. M. Trevelyan says of John Bright, that he had a great distaste and almost an incapacity for wading through a bundle of official papers. Instead of poring over papers the Prime Minister collected information from the lips of Departmental colleagues and experts, whom he could cross-examine. This process he carried on while they were his guests at breakfast. And it was not merely a breakfast habit. As Carson testified, Lloyd George at any time until midnight went on seeing persons who were likely to give him information, and not only expert opinion but also the opinion of the man on the street.

With regard to the meetings of Ministers at breakfast, Lord Alness writes that "it is impossible to over-estimate their value. On occasion the Prime Minister had just come back from discussions in France with the High Command. We always found him not foolishly optimistic but always soberly confident. That was so even in the dark days of March, 1918. Thus he maintained the morale of his Ministry just as he maintained the morale of the country. That was a supreme task, splendidly discharged."

Even the War Cabinet, small though it was, had occasional breaches. A quarrel with Arthur Henderson caused commotion. Henderson, accompanied by Ramsay MacDonald, went to Paris to discuss with French and Russian comrades the project of a conference of Socialists from all the belligerent countries, including Germany, on war aims at Stockholm. He had been on a Government mission to Russia and thought that good service would be done by the Russians having contact with the French and British. His visit to Paris was disapproved of by Cabinet colleagues.

The notorious "door-mat" incident which followed gave immense amusement to critics who hated the idea of a Minister hob-nobbing at Stockholm with Germans. On being invited to a meeting of the Cabinet, Henderson was naturally affronted at being kept waiting for an hour in a secretary's room. G. N. Barnes who had temporarily taken his place while he was in Russia came out of the Cabinet room to make a statement to him, but he rejected that intervention.

Henderson persisted in his course. On his advice the Labour Party decided to send delegates to Stockholm. The Prime Minister remonstrated with him, but as he gathered that his retention of the Labour Party Secretaryship was considered incompatible with membership of the War Cabinet he gave up his Government position. Out-and-out supporters of the Government effusively welcomed his resignation. Barnes, the mild-mannered, thoughtful, meditative man who henceforth filled his place, was highly respected by all parties.

Churchill had to wait many months for office. The Conservative cabal which lowered his status in the first Coalition barred his way in the second Coalition. It was not till the summer of 1917 that Lloyd George felt strong enough to defy the cabal and appoint Churchill Minister of Munitions. Even now, although he excelled in genius for war, and his brain was always active in advice on strategy, he was not among the oligarchs, officially at any rate.

Carson's career was erratic. He left the Admiralty after being First Lord for seven months. For a similar period he was in the War Cabinet, without Portfolio. He retired in order that he should not embarrass his colleagues in any decision they might take about the Irish Convention which had been set up.

Austen Chamberlain, though free from personal blame, resigned the India Office on account of the report of the Commission on the Mesopotamia operations and hospital arrangements. His action was considered Quixotic, and after an interval there was general approval of his appointment in Carson's place in the War Cabinet. Samuel Montagu, who succeeded him in the India Office, was one of Asquith's few intimate Liberal colleagues who joined the Lloyd George Government.

Two post-war Prime Ministers held office for the first time under Lloyd George. Stanley Baldwin, who was picked out from a back bench by Bonar Law, got his first step on the Government ladder as a Junior Lord of the Treasury, with the duties of a Whip. A business man with affection for his pipe and the Classics, he had spoken only half-a-dozen times in the nine years since his election to Parliament. Neville Chamberlain, although not yet in Parliament, was appointed Director-General of National Service, but resigned seven months later, when friction occurred between his hurriedly contrived office and other Departments.

No incident in 1917 impressed me more deeply than the appearance of Major "Willie" Redmond, the Nationalist leader's brother, in the uniform of the King, home on leave from the front, and his passionate appeal to the House to let the dead past bury its dead and make a new start in the relations between England and Ireland. Members in all quarters cheered him enthusiastically, and Peers and strangers showed emotion as they listened to his words. This was the last service that gallant Willie Redmond, who had been one of the liveliest political fighters, was able to do in Parliament for the two countries. He died from wounds in battle a few months later.

The debate in which he thrilled the House arose on T. P. O'Connor's motion to set Home Rule in operation without further delay. One more step was taken to end the domestic strife, by the summoning of a Convention of Irishmen to produce a scheme of self-government for their country. It sat for several months and the conciliatory attitude of the leaders gave promise of a settlement. Once more that vision faded. John Redmond, the eloquent, dignified leader of the Constitutional

movement, died broken-hearted and the Nationalist members under his successor, John Dillon, took up an aggressive attitude to the Government.

The enactment for the extension by Order in Council of compulsory service to Ireland still more alienated Nationalist sympathy. It was resisted by the members whom Dillon led and they deserted Westminster in order to take part in an agitation in their own country. The Government undertook to bring forward a new Bill for Irish self-government, and hoped to carry it simultaneously with the application of compulsory service, but no measure for that purpose proved practicable, nor was compulsory service in Ireland ever enforced.

The entry of America into the War in April, 1917, gave profound relief to all who knew of our difficulties from the submarines and from finance. It was cordially welcomed in Parliament. A resolution expressing appreciation of the action of the United States was passed in both Houses. It was moved and seconded in the House of Commons by Bonar Law and Asquith, and in the House of Lords by Curzon and Crewe. Asquith's speech was particularly good, and so was a speech by Bryce who knew America so well.

The introduction of the Cabinet Secretariat was one of Lloyd George's daring defiances of tradition. Not only would Victorian Ministers have shuddered at the idea of anyone except a member of the Cabinet listening to and recording its proceedings, but this invasion of its privacy was repugnant even to statesmen of the present century.

Formerly the door of the Cabinet room was never opened except by a Minister—to the junior Minister this duty was allotted—and no one else was admitted except an expert called in to give advice or information. There was no agenda and there were no minutes. The only record of decisions was in the Prime Minister's letter to the Sovereign and that was not shown to his colleagues. Members of the Cabinet were forbidden to take a note of the discussions. That unwritten rule had the high authority of Disraeli and Gladstone, and was maintained by Salisbury and Asquith. Whatever advantage it may have had in securing the free exchange of opinion, the absence of a formal record at the table led, on several occasions, to differences and misunderstandings between Ministers about what they had decided.

Under the new system that dilemma was prevented. As described by Sir John Simon, who found it in operation on his return to office, after a long interval, in 1931, the Cabinet Secretary attended every meeting and sat at the Prime Minister's side and made a full note of every Cabinet decision, together with such record as was necessary of the main considerations which led up to it.

I gathered that although individual speeches were not recorded a full summary of the discussion was made at first, but if that ever was the practice apparently it did not continue. Viscount Hailsham, speaking in 1932, repudiated the idea of minutes. What were recorded, Parliament was told, were Cabinet conclusions, though presumably these would involve a statement of the "main considerations."

The value of the Secretariat has been proved by its retention by successive Governments. Expediency called for it when Departmental Ministers did not sit in the supreme Cabinet, and it became indispensable even in ordinary conditions on account of the immense development of work in the Cabinet and in Cabinet committees and Ministerial conferences. The Secretariat prepares the agenda, distributes to Ministers the necessary documents, and communicates the decisions to those who have to carry them out.

## CHAPTER XIV

### THE MOVING FINGER

*Democratic Advance—Revolution in Russia—Electoral Reform—Votes and Seats for Women—The “Grill” Removed—Women in Strangers’ Gallery—Indian Reform—Jerks and Agitations—“The Curate”—Lloyd George’s Victories—Maurice Division—National Thanksgiving.*

THE OLD POLITICAL WORLD WAS PASSING AWAY. DISRAELI SAID TO THE MEN OF HIS time: “You have a new world, new influences at work, new and unknown objects and dangers with which to cope, at present involved in that obscurity incident to novelty in such affairs.” That might have been repeated with increased force in 1914-1918. Democratic reform was in the air. The breeze was stimulated by the War, and was wafted even from Russia. High hopes were raised by the Russian democratic Revolution of March, 1917, and its sweeping away of Autocracy. Lloyd George hailed it as the first great triumph of the principles for which we entered the War. Unfortunately, our immediate hopes were crushed by the October Revolution, organised by Lenin and Stalin, which overthrew Kerensky and the “Moderates” and placed in power the Bolsheviks, who concluded Peace with the Germans at Brest-Litovsk.

I heard much in those days about the change in “political values.” “Government of the people, for the people, by those who know better,” was described by a cynic as the axiom of the old ruling class, and especially the aristocratic Whigs. That had long ceased to be the acknowledged precept of any class or party. Now all recognised that safety for the State lay in Robespierre’s and Abraham Lincoln’s ideal of government of the people *by the people* for the people.

The war-time Parliament, which was repeatedly prolonged to avoid a General Election, was the last chosen by men alone. The representative system made in a year or two advances which in normal times might have been the subject of hot controversy for a decade. Woman’s victory was the most spectacular feature of the Representation of the People Act of 1918. Other important reforms were based on the findings of the Conference, initiated by Asquith when in power and presided over by Mr. Speaker Lowther.

A far larger number of voters than in any previous extension of the Franchise were added to the Electorate. Six million women, in the lowest estimate, were enfranchised and two or three million additional men were placed on the Register by new qualifications. Plural voting was limited by the elector being allowed to vote in only two constituencies; polls were all to take place on the same day instead of being scattered over two or three weeks; provision was made for the redistribution of seats on a uniform basis as far as possible with regard to population. When the motion for legislation on the Conference lines was submitted by Asquith, now the

'leader of the Opposition, three score Conservatives for one reason or other voted against it, but it was carried to the Statute Book by the Lloyd George Government, even in the midst of war anxieties.

Many members who had strenuously opposed female suffrage changed their attitude for the reason given by Asquith, that women had worked out their salvation by war service. Others were moved by the desire to get rid of a troublesome question.

The right to vote was not woman's only political victory. It was followed as a "natural corollary" by her right of election to Parliament. A motion with this object by Sir Herbert Samuel was carried by an overwhelming majority. The outlook had changed since the time when Beresford Hope imagined with horror the addition of a "flirting lobby" to the House.

It was an anomaly of the new legislation that women would be able to sit in Parliament at the age of 21, whereas they could not vote in an Election till they were 30. Ten years were to pass before they could vote at the same age as men.

Till 1917 the only accommodation for women was in the Ladies' Gallery above the Speaker's Chair, where they were screened by the iron lattice. In the reserved apartment I have seen generations of privileged ladies watching the scene since Mrs. Gladstone looked down with affectionate concern on the "G.O.M." I don't know if the "grille" was originally intended to veil the occupants of the Gallery from the gaze of men. Some Victorian women defended it because "it enables us to sit as we like, to talk together, to hang up our shawls and bonnets and dress as we please." Even when Herbert Gladstone, First Commissioner of Works, in 1894, proposed to remove it he could not find agreement either among members or among ladies. It was only in the year of the political emancipation of women that the grating was removed.

There was a still more striking change in the Strangers' Gallery. Successive Speakers had enforced the rule that a woman could not claim admission to the House as a stranger. But barriers were now being thrown down, and in 1918, in accordance with the declared wish of Parliament, the two sexes, for the first time, sat together in the Gallery.

The declaration of our Indian policy in 1917 was one of the most significant incidents of an era of reform. As announced by the Secretary of State (Montagu) the Government's aim was the increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the progressive realisation of responsible government in India as an integral part of the British Empire. The carrying out of that declaration led to memorable controversies for many years.

Even the second Coalition, although less disturbed than the first, was not without its Parliamentary jerks and agitations. There were several Secret Sessions and there were Lobby crises when the fate of the Prime Minister was supposed to be in jeopardy.

Bonar Law conducted the day-by-day business of the House in a manner which gave general satisfaction. He was not a brilliant leader, but he was frank and friendly. As Chancellor of the Exchequer he carried out his heavy, anxious duties with business-like ability. So extraordinary was his memory that he presented a financial statement on a scale far exceeding any previously known, with the aid

only of notes on a single scrap of paper. But, like every other member of the Government, he was overshadowed by the Prime Minister. Cynics called him "the curate."

Criticism called forth Lloyd George's full Parliamentary powers and in hours of difficulty his oratory flashed. Although many of his speeches were ragged and broken by interjected phrases, he cast a spell on the House by his eloquence, and succeeded in rallying friends and routing foes. His triumphs were resounding when he was attacked by newspapers and politicians of various shades.

"Only twenty-four hours" were, in an excited Lobby, given to Lloyd George as his remaining span of official life by Hogge and Pringle, two astute guerilla fighters, towards the end of 1917, when he came from the Conference at Rapallo with the agreement for the creation of a Supreme War Council of the Allies. On his way he delivered in Paris a speech indicting the strategy hitherto carried out and depicting the situation with, as he said, "perhaps brutal frankness." Leading newspapers, Conservative and Liberal, denounced him for interference with the Higher Command and agitated for his dismissal from office. Uneasiness was felt by his friends in Parliament.

His reply to fault-finders and doubters was an astounding oratorical success. He dissipated suspicion, at any rate in friendly quarters, of what lay behind the new project, declaring that he was utterly opposed to a Generalissimo, and he turned fiercely on assailants whom he charged with an attempt to sow dissension between soldiers and politicians.

"Part whitewash, part balderdash," was Asquith's description of his speech to a colleague; others said in the Lobby that "L.G." bamboozled the House; but the tremendous cheering at the end showed that he had won another round in the Parliamentary ring. Criticism was revived when the inter-Allied Council plan was developed and the British Military representative at Versailles was made independent of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff. Soldiers as well as politicians joined in the criticism. Different considerations prevailed when after the disaster of March, 1918, unity of command was secured, with the full assent, if not on the initiative, of Haig, and with the approval of the Cabinet, by the appointment of Foch to combine the operations of the Armies.

A permanent mark was made on the Liberal party and political history by the "Maurice Division." Sir Frederick Maurice, who was for over two years Director of Military Operations on the Imperial General Staff, felt that blame for the success of the terrific German offensive was unfairly placed on Haig and the Generals, and at the sacrifice of his own future he publicly challenged statements by Lloyd George and Bonar Law about the strength of the Army in France. Excitement was caused by this extremely grave charge. It shook the Government. Bonar Law announced that the Cabinet proposed to invite two Judges to inquire into it. Asquith moved for inquiry by a Parliamentary Committee.

The Prime Minister not only opposed Asquith's motion but seized the opportunity to drop the Government's own proposal. I heard a rumour that Balfour was amazed by that proposal and stamped on the idea of Ministers being tried by Judges. Lloyd George submitted the question to the direct verdict of the House. He obtained a conspicuous victory.

In the division the vote of the Liberals was of special significance. They were supposed hitherto to be to an overwhelming extent on Asquith's side, but now, though the majority of the party went with Asquith, a considerable proportion was found in Lloyd George's camp. This strengthened his position and prestige. The division marked in the future the boundary between his followers and the Asquithians.

I have described the most striking Parliamentary events during the first Great War. Although the power of the Executive had necessarily increased, the ultimate authority of the House of Commons was maintained. The fitness of our free institutions to conduct a struggle of unprecedented magnitude was established.

The sense of national relief on Armistice Day was as great as, if not greater than, on any previous occasion in our history. There was but one thought that day. Parliament was united in solemn gratitude at the end of what the Prime Minister described as "the cruellest and most terrible war that had ever scourged mankind." In one of his shortest, as well as most solemn and impressive, speeches he expressed the common feeling when he hoped that this was the end of all wars. Asquith, with a full heart, joined in the aspiration that we had entered upon a new chapter in international history in which war would be recognised as an obsolete anachronism, never to be revived. Inspired by these feelings, Lords and Commons proceeded to St. Margaret's, where they gave humble and reverent thanks to God for the deliverance of the world from the great peril.

## CHAPTER XV

### COUPON ELECTION

*"Hang the Kaiser"—Liberal Eclipse—"F.E." on Woolsack—Irish Nationalists Gone—"T.P."—Labour Front Bench—"Wee Frees"—First Woman to take a Seat—Hard-faced Men—"L.G.'s" Triumph—The Commons Sing Again—Asquith Back—Indian Vision—Last Irish Secretary—Sinn Fein Treaty—Bonar Law Decides—Morley Reappears—Carson's Attack—Healy, Governor-General—Famous Veteran leaves the Commons—Coalition Mutiny—The "Cabin Boy"—Bonar Law Premier—"Who? Who?" Government.*

POLITICAL WAR WAS REVIVED WITHOUT A DAY'S RESPITE WHEN THE PARLIAMENT WHICH lasted for eight years was dissolved. Lloyd George and Bonar Law had arrived at an understanding on policy, which they announced on the day after the Armistice, and they jointly asked for authority to go to the Peace Conference and begin reconstruction at home. The Labour party withdrew from the Coalition and Asquith's Liberal followers also maintained their party integrity.

The Election of December, 1918, became known as the Coupon Election. "Coupon" was the name derisively given by Asquith to the letter from the two Coalition leaders to the candidates who could be relied on to support the Government. In this Election, as in the Khaki Election of 1900, the country was swayed by sentiments excited by the war. "Hang the Kaiser" and "Make Germany Pay" were the popular slogans of the Government candidates. It was insisted that our enemies must be "squeezed till the pips squeaked" to pay the cost of the war.

Few Liberals without the Coupon survived. Asquith, distrusting the domestic policy of the Government, stood as a Liberal "without prefix or suffix" and he and his principal lieutenants were defeated. He lost to a Conservative the seat for East Fife which he had held since he entered Parliament. The angry feeling of his followers at his deposition from the Prime Ministership was intensified by his defeat.

The vast majority of 263 over all parties was obtained by the Coalition, and as the 73 Sinn Feiners elected in Ireland did not come to Westminster the actual majority was still greater. Labour had 59 seats. Coalition Liberals numbered 139, but there were only 28 independent Liberals, known henceforth, like the small minority of the Free Church of Scotland who refused to concur in its union with the United Presbyterian Church, as "Wee Frees."

It was charged against Lloyd George that, like Joseph Chamberlain, he broke up the Liberal party. Neither was essentially a rigid party man. The driving force of both was, in an unusual degree, personal. Lloyd George was no doctrinaire. Strict Gladstonians said he was not a Liberal. He was not enthusiastic for Home Rule, nor for Free Trade.

The Government was reconstituted, but in its personnel was little altered. Bonar Law as Lord Privy Seal continued to lead the Commons; Austen Chamberlain succeeded him as Chancellor of the Exchequer but was refused the Chancellor's official residence, No. 11, Downing Street, as the Prime Minister desired that Bonar should remain his next-door neighbour.

Eyebrows were raised and shoulders shrugged at F. E. Smith's appointment as Lord Chancellor. Brilliant though he was as lawyer and politician, even Conservatives doubted if the Woolsack was the place for the master of daring invective.

I heard a good story a few years later about the Lord Chancellor. Haldane hearing that he was going to Holyrood on a visit to the Lord High Commissioner to the Church of Scotland sent him a copy of *The Reign of Relativity* in the hope that it might while away an hour or two of his journey. "F.E." sent Haldane a courteous acknowledgment, adding "P.S.—I am going sleeper."

There was uneasiness at Churchill's appointment as Secretary for War and Air Minister. Fear of his restless, venturesome brain was still felt by the prudent; and that feeling was further provoked by the War Office activities, although he did not initiate the policy, to assist with arms the "Whites" in Russia against the "Reds."

An appointment regarded as a stroke of genius was that of Lord Sinha as Under-Secretary for India. Lord Sinha was the first Indian to enter the British Government and to receive a Peerage.

Irish Nationalists were missed by old British colleagues. Life was seldom dull while they were in force at Westminster, with their vivacity and humour. Personally they were not unpopular.

One incident will show their good nature and gaiety in times of political strife. When Lord Stanley, afterwards so influential as the Earl of Derby, was Postmaster General in Balfour's Government, the business of his department came before the House on the eve of the Grand National. The Irish knew that he was anxious to see the race. They carried on discussion till a late hour; but suddenly desisted in time for Lord Stanley to catch the night train, and they sent him off with a merry cheer.

Now there were only half-a-dozen Nationalists. Among them were T. P. O'Connor, Joe Devlin, the eloquent, valiant little man whom Healy called "Duodccimo Demosthenes," and Jerry MacVeagh, whose daily interjections were so pithy and amusing. After a speech by T. P. O'Connor in his early years, a fellow-countryman in the Gallery exclaimed, "Bravo! Tay Pay; sure it's you that's the gran' man," In the Lobby he was always Tay Pay. The years mellowed him. Mild mannered and dignified in old age, and honoured with a Privy Councillorship, he was regarded with affection as the Father of the House. He was one of the few members in recent times who wore their hats in the House and one of the few who took snuff.

\* A new chapter in Parliamentary history was opened when the Chairman of the Labour Party, Willie Adamson, rose "for to" make a few remarks from the front Opposition bench. This was the first time that Labour members took that place. As the largest party in Opposition, the Sinn Feiners being absent, they claimed the rights due to His Majesty's Opposition. Sir Donald Maclean, Chairman of the Liberal "Wee Frees," who, with equal courage and urbanity, upheld his party's principles, retained his seat on the same privileged bench.

I observed that when the Commons were summoned to the House of Lords at the opening of Parliament, Bonar Law at the head of the procession beckoned Adamson to his side as if the Labour Leader were the real leader of the Opposition, but Maclean did not relinquish his rights. It was arranged that the rivals should ask the customary questions about business in alternate weeks.

There was a historic revolution in the Parliamentary world when, at the end of 1919, a woman entered the House as a Member. At the prorogation shortly afterwards a change was made in the formula of the King's Speech. Instead of addressing "My Lords and Gentlemen," His Majesty addressed "My Lords and Members of the House of Commons."

Mme. Markievicz had been elected for Dublin at the General Election, but as she was a Sinn Feiner and did not come to Westminster, Lady Astor, who was returned for the constituency represented by her husband before his succession to the Peerage, had the distinction of being the first woman to take a seat in the House. There was a flutter of curiosity and interest on the crowded benches when she advanced to the table between the Prime Minister and Balfour. If there was any embarrassment it was on the part of her introducers; Lady Astor talked to them all the way. Women reporters, never before, I believe, in the Press Gallery, were admitted on this occasion. Two years later Lady Astor was followed by Mrs. Wintringham, an Independent Liberal, who occupied her husband's place when he died in the precincts of the House.

"A lot of hard-faced men who look as if they had done very well out of the war." This was the description of new members given by an old Conservative to J. M. Keynes who recorded it in *Economic Consequences of the Peace*. I don't know how far the gibe was justified, but I have seldom seen such an uninteresting and uninterested company of men as were thrown into Westminster by the surge of national feeling. Many had little knowledge of politics and still less of Parliament, and took as slight a share as possible in the work of the House.

The Cabinet was effectively in Paris; there was a Second Eleven of Ministers in London during the Peace Conference. As a rule supporters of the Government were docile, but on one occasion Conservative members incited by Lloyd George's former Press champions became fractious. They were afraid that at the Peace Conference he was falling away from his Election declarations about the indemnities to be exacted from Germany.

A telegram from 370 troubled members asking for assurances brought Lloyd George home with a whip. He lashed and scourged Press and Parliamentary fault-finders, and held Lord Northcliffe up to ridicule as a grass-hopper. The invective, satire and humour of his speech dazzled and intimidated the House. Once more, by his counter-offensive, he scored an overwhelming victory and strengthened his position.

The summit of Lloyd George's career was attained at the signing of the Treaty of Peace. The King met him at the railway station on his return from Paris, and he was hailed with enthusiasm by the House of Commons. Almost all the Members rose in his honour. The National Anthem was sung again, as it was in 1914, Peers, journalists and strangers, as well as Members, standing and joining in the demonstration.

Among the laurels with which Lloyd George was crowned were those from colleagues who had been associated with him in the direction of the war. He became, in Balfour's words, one of the greatest figures of the greatest period of the world's history, and Bonar Law predicted that a hundred years hence he might occupy in people's minds the place now occupied by Pitt.

I have heard many men say that "L.G." should have retired at the conclusion of peace when his fame was unequalled in the world. He could have lived ever after in an undimmed halo of glory and gratitude. But Lloyd George could not rest and be thankful. He himself admitted in later years that he stayed on too long. His ambition and desire to continue to play a great part in the world kept him in office.

The formation of a Cabinet of the old type in October, 1919, gave a general sense of relief to his colleagues. A Cabinet limited to a few of the Ministers was tolerated in war, even by men of strict constitutional propriety, but was in peace disliked by everybody, and most of all by the members of the Government who had to wait on the mat for the orders of the autocrats. They were relieved when collective responsibility was restored.

Parliament too looked like its old self when Asquith reappeared, on his election for Paisley, in 1920. "Welcome Home," the Speaker whispered to him after he took the oath. The House of Commons was truly Asquith's home, although to many members he was a stranger.

Peace as well as war had its anxieties and crises. Many problems arose out of the Treaty of Versailles. Its operation involved conferences which took the Prime Minister abroad and caused not only difficulties with Germany, but also friction with France. At home there were demobilisation troubles and there was social and industrial unrest. The railway strike was particularly disturbing. At the same time the demand for the reduction of expenditure resulted in the "Geddes Axe." Sir Eric Geddes and his brother, Sir Auckland, were brought into office and Parliament in the Lloyd George régime, and distinguished themselves.

Constitutional changes were projected even in a Parliament of "hard-faced men." In a single week the Commons adopted a resolution moved by Wood, the future Viscount Halifax, in favour of subordinate Legislatures within the United Kingdom; and without a division read the second time a Bill to start India on the road to self-government.

The imagination and pen of Burke would have been required to unfold the significance of the scene on a sunny afternoon in 1919, when tall Edwin Montagu, bending over the box and dropping and replacing his eye glass, expounded to a few score members a Bill by which 315 million people were affected, while Indian Princes, some in khaki, some in robe and turban, looked over the rail of the special gallery.

Herbert Fisher, President of the Board of Education, was persuasive in his advocacy of reform. His serene temper reminded me of Morley's. He enriched a House, not conspicuous for erudition, with his learning, his fineness of mind, and his felicity in speech.

Southern Ireland was a baffling irritant to Government and Parliament in the 'twenties, when guerilla warfare was waged by insurgents against the British forces and outrages and disturbances paralysed the institutions of the country. Lord French, the Lord Lieutenant, against whose life an attempt was made, saw things going from bad to worse. Something had to be done. Should it be by ruthless force or by concession to Nationalist feeling?

With the olive branch in one hand and the sword ready in the other, the Government put forward a new Home Rule Bill instead of the Act of 1914 which had never been brought into operation. It provided for two legislatures, one for Southern Ireland and the other for Ulster, with a joint harmonizing Council. Ulster accepted the plan, but Sinn Fein rejected the Constitution for Southern Ireland. Asquith urged that it should have Dominion status, but the Government would not at first go so far.

The Executive was confronted in 1920 by still more crime. Constables, Army officers and other agents of the Government were murdered. The Special Police, nick-named from their uniform Black-and-Tans, carried out their dangerous duties with the utmost rigour and made reprisals for outrages. Precautions against the revolutionaries were necessary even in Great Britain.

The Galleries in the Houses of Parliament were closed for many months. Strangers were excluded from the Lobby. Barriers were erected at Downing Street.

The duties of Chief Secretary for Ireland were extremely exacting. Ian Macpherson (afterwards Lord Strathcarron) held the position for fifteen troubled months. When his health gave way and he was transferred to the Pensions Ministry he was succeeded by a man of tougher fibre, Hamar Greenwood (Lord Greenwood) who proved to be the last Chief Secretary. The House of Commons was distressed by the terrible situation, and not least by the reprisals of the Black-and-Tans, against whose proceedings the future Lord Halifax raised a voice from the Conservative side.

I think that the House was on the whole relieved, although murmurs came from Die-hards, when the Prime Minister entered into negotiation with the Sinn Fein leaders. A truce in the warfare was arranged. De Valera, President of the Dail Eireann Cabinet, came over and conferred with Lloyd George, and they had tea together. Meanwhile the King opened the first Parliament of Northern Ireland and appealed to all Irishmen to forgive and forget.

Dominion status, with reservations, was at last offered to Southern Ireland. This meant "free, equal and loyal partnership in the British Commonwealth." But de Valera demanded recognition of his country as a sovereign state.

Emissaries from Dublin visited Lloyd George when he was on holiday at Gairloch. His colleagues assembled—some of them unwillingly—in the Highlands. A Cabinet out of London was not unprecedented. One of the most notorious was the Torpid Cabinet at Pembroke Lodge, Richmond, on a summer evening in 1854 when the Duke of Newcastle read the instructions to Lord Raglan, which led to the invasion of the Crimea. But a Cabinet so far away as Inverness was as romantic as the Highland capital itself. On the day that it met, Lloyd George visited the King at Moy, the residence of The Mackintosh.

Die-hards attacked Lloyd George for conferring with rebels, but he was undaunted. He replied in the voice of Gladstone. His appeal to conscience and his plea for the ending of the feud of centuries reminded me of the Prime Minister who first proposed Home Rule for Ireland.

I have been in Downing Street in many crises, but few were so exciting as on the December night in 1921 when the decisive stage in the conference of Eireann and British Ministers was reached. Was it to be Peace or War? That question was asked when the meeting which began at 3 o'clock was adjourned at 7.30. As the Irish Ministers did not reappear till 11.20 and as the Conference went on from hour to hour after midnight, hopes of a settlement became faint. At half-past two in the morning our suspense was ended. Lord Birkenhead, on the doorway of No. 10, announced that agreement had been reached. It involved allegiance to the Throne by Eire and membership of the Empire. (De Valera was not a member of the delegation.)

No event had caused so much relief since the Armistice. It added another feather to Lloyd George's cap.

But what about Bonar Law? There was doubt about his attitude. He was not now in the Government. Worn out, he had resigned. Austen Chamberlain succeeded him as leader of the House, the new Chancellor of the Exchequer being Sir Robert Horne, and Baldwin President of the Board of Trade. But Bonar Law, though out of office, had more influence in the Conservative party than anybody else.

When the Prime Minister expounded the Treaty establishing the Irish Free State, Bonar Law appeared in the House for the first time after his illness. He sat in the side gallery facing the Government—an aloof, strange place for an ex-Minister. By and by he took a seat below the Ministerial gangway. Then in one of the bravest steps of his career he defied the Die-hards and declared in favour of the Irish Agreement. Consequently its acceptance by the House was assured.

Morley, frail and old-looking, came to the House of Lords at the opening of Parliament in December, 1921, for the first time since the General Election of 1918. It was appropriate that the veteran champion of Home Rule should move the address in response to the King's Speech, welcoming the Irish Agreement with "heartfelt joy."

Many years previously when the cause of Home Rule suffered a repulse (as he now recalled), Morley ventured to remark to the King—"Well, Sir, don't let us be too sure that your Majesty will not some day perhaps, sooner or later, receive Home Rule proposals from Conservative Ministers." The leading Conservative Ministers were among the signatories to the Agreement at the fateful conference in Downing Street.

One Unionist champion was horrified by what his old colleagues had done. Carson was a Lord of Appeal. When he accepted that office he thought, and others thought, that it meant the end of his political life. But his judicial position did not restrain him when he dealt with the Irish question. A violent attack on the Treaty was made by Carson. He mourned "the obsequies of the Unionist party" and the "scuttling" of Great Britain out of Ireland; he taunted Lloyd George with his acquiescence in Dominion status for the Free State, and he expressed disgust at the conduct of Joseph Chamberlain's son, in signing the Treaty with Sinn Fein. Lord Birkenhead, who as "Galloper Smith" was Carson's lieutenant in organising the Ulster Army before the Great War, replied from the Woolsack to his "wild and foolish words" in equally pungent rhetoric, declaring that his speech as a constructive effort of statecraft would be immature on the lips of a hysterical school-girl.

Austen Chamberlain elsewhere defended his own action with characteristic courage and candour. He quoted Lord Salisbury's remark in a letter to Lord Lytton that "the commonest error in politics is sticking to the carcases of dead policies." The policy for which Austen and his colleagues had fought was dead. There were decisive majorities for the treaty in both Houses. Even in the House of Lords, the bulwark in past times of Unionism, it had a majority of 119.

Unfortunately the two principal Irish signatories did not long survive to carry out the treaty. Dail Eireann, by a narrow majority, approved of it; and Arthur Griffith was elected President in place of de Valera, and Michael Collins was appointed Chairman of the Provisional Government. British Ministers who had learned to respect the two men were grieved by their death in August, 1922. Griffith died from heart failure and Michael Collins, the brave and honourable man who had taken over the command of the Irish Government Army in the civil war, was shot in an ambush.

Few announcements in the Court Circular have excited such lively interest as that dated Buckingham Palace, December 16, 1922:—"Mr. Timothy Healy was received in audience by the King this morning and kissed hands upon his appointment as Governor-General of the Irish Free State." It was difficult for members who had sat with him in Parliament to picture "Tim" Healy as His Excellency, but they were delighted with his nomination, both for personal reasons and because they thought it was a good omen. The nomination was made by Bonar Law, when Prime Minister.

The "Coupon" Parliament was only a year or two old when anxious Coalitionists began to speculate about the political future. Attempts to form a permanent Centre Party did not succeed. The only hope of the Coalitionists was in their leader. In 1920 Lloyd George was the guest, at dinner, of the Constitutional Club. He was there, he remarked (as Joseph Chamberlain remarked a quarter of a century earlier), not because he had changed, or his hosts had changed, but because times had changed.

An interesting story was brought to the Lobby from a garden party at No. 10 in 1921. Lloyd George said to Colonel Penry Williams, "I believe the last time we met was when I addressed a meeting at Middlesbrough." "Yes," said Colonel Williams, "we sang the Land Song together." "And we'll do so again," Lloyd George merrily rejoined.

Meantime the Liberals followed their divided courses. Early in 1922 the Coalition Liberals decided to form themselves into a distinct party. "Our party is the Liberal party," declared Sir Gordon Hewart, the future Lord Chief Justice, one of the few lawyers who have distinguished themselves both in Parliament and at the Bar. The Independent Liberals held a counter demonstration, addressed by Asquith and Viscount Grey. Lloyd George flung gibes at his former chief. "Some people," Asquith said, "could not be taught good taste or good manners."

Grey was hailed with enthusiasm on his return to the political arena after five years' retirement. He was Ambassador to the United States for six months in 1919-20. Now he took part in domestic controversy, criticising the Coalition and calling for the restoration of wholesome, straightforward politics. Although conscious of failing sight during the war, Grey was able to read as easily as most men of his age till 1918, but when speaking a year or two later he held his notes close to his eyes.

The House of Commons lost its most famous veteran when Balfour accepted a Peerage. He sat in the House with Disraeli. Yet his figure was still lithe, and his intellect bore no sign of age. Gossips said that on receiving the Order of the Garter he was surprised to find himself "Sir Arthur" instead of Mr. Balfour. After an interval he became an Earl.

Since the war he had added to his long list of national services. The success of the League of Nations in its early years was due largely to his guidance. One of his greatest achievements was at the Washington Naval Conference in 1921-22. He had won the affection and respect of the Americans when he headed a mission to their Government in 1917—the first Cabinet Minister who ever went to Washington—and he produced the same effect at the Naval Conference. I heard Lord Riddell, who represented the British Press at Washington, describe at a club dinner in his honour how Balfour impressed America by his promptitude in dealing with the detailed and drastic proposals sprung upon the Conference by Secretary Hughes. A timid man might have required to consult the Government at home on the proposals, but Balfour, then Lord President of the Council, in a speech at the opening of the discussion for which he prepared himself in his Parliamentary manner by notes on a long envelope, immediately endorsed the proposals in principle. This he himself considered one of the most important and fortunate decisions that he ever took. His handling of the subject and his manner aroused the admiration and enthusiasm of America.

In 1922, Lloyd George's rule was undermined by disaffected Conservatives and at last shattered. He had wielded greater power than any modern Prime Minister. In that supremacy men who had taken the "coupon" were pleased for years to acquiesce. Now there were foolish murmurs that he had seized an unconstitutional position. The fact was that many of the men elected in 1918 were weary of rule by a forceful Liberal. His policy caused them concern; the Die-hards never forgave him for the Irish Treaty and resented the Indian reforms.

I saw dislike of the Government's Indian policy in the jubilation of Conservatives at the downfall of Montagu. When he got into trouble with his Cabinet colleagues for publishing without their authority a telegram from the Indian Government regarding the Near East his resignation was hailed with extraordinary cheers. According to his own version of the affair his head was presented on a charger to the Die-hards.

The plans of the Government for the continuance of the existing political conditions were thwarted by the Conservative party machine. It was whispered in 1922 that the Cabinet intended at an appropriate moment to appeal to the country as a Coalition. This design was opposed by Sir George Younger (afterwards Viscount Younger), the Chairman of the Conservative party organisation, and, although Lord Birkenhead sneered at the "cabin boy" who was trying to steer the political ship, he had the support of members of the crew.

Lloyd George contemplated resignation unless assured of the loyal support of the Conservatives. One of his Liberal colleagues told me on a critical day that there was danger of his retiring that very night. I heard also that he was prepared to hand over the Government to Austen Chamberlain. The principal Ministers induced him to remain. For some months longer Lloyd George commanded overwhelming majorities, but uneasiness was increased by his pro-Greek policy and the risk of war with Turkey in the Chanak crisis—a danger averted by the tact of General Sir Charles Harington.

Party government was revived by Conservatives at their meeting at the Carlton Club in October. They threw over their own leader, Austen Chamberlain, who by his loyalty to Lloyd George lost again his chance of the Prime Ministership; and they disregarded Balfour's advice. The revolt against the Coalition was led by Baldwin, the President of the Board of Trade, who dreaded the disintegrating influence of Lloyd George's dynamic force. Junior Ministers shared his feeling. But the unexpectedly large majority of two to one in favour of the Conservatives going to the country as an independent party was due principally to Bonar Law's intervention.

It was only at the last moment that Bonar decided to attend the meeting. When he came and declared against Coalition its defeat was certain. He had co-operated with Lloyd George in upsetting Asquith; now he upset Lloyd George.

Lloyd George resigned immediately. So sudden was the political transformation that on his return from the Palace he found at Downing Street a miners' deputation which he was to have received. "I am very sorry, gentlemen," he said, "I cannot receive you. I am no longer Prime Minister."

What would he do next? That was a question which all politicians, and many persons who were not politicians, put to each other. No one could answer it. He had been in Cabinet office for seventeen years, and for six years had held the highest position. But he did not take off his armour.

"My sword is in my hand," he declared as he set out on a new campaign. (Another campaign was opened that autumn by the march of the "Blacksirts" on Rome. The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics was formed in December.)

The Government formed by Bonar Law was laughed at by the Coalitionists. They hailed it in the spirit of the Duke of Wellington's "who? who?" when the names of the Derby Ministry of 1852 were repeated to the Duke by its head. Only a few of the members of the new Government were well known. Curzon continued

at the Foreign Office, pleased to have in his own hands instead of in Lloyd George's the direction of its policy; and Baldwin who had risen rapidly in the Coalition Government became Chancellor of the Exchequer. But most of the former Ministers stood aside, and Lloyd George, glancing at Under-Secretaries who were taken into the Cabinet, jeered at "promotions out of the kitchen."

## CHAPTER XVI

### LABOUR STEPS UP

*The Second Party in the State—Ramsay MacDonald Returns—"The Red Flag"—Bonar Law's Illness—Baldwin preferred to Curzon—Offer to McKenna—Neville Chamberlain Chancellor—Plunge for Protection—Liberals United—MacDonald in Office—New Labour Peers—First Woman Minister—Humble Men in High Places—Fair Play from other Parties—Snowden's Budget—Aloof Premier—The "Red Letter"—MacDonald's great adventure ended—The Liberal Forty—Asquith's Misfortune.*

ANOTHER ADVANCE OF THE WORKING CLASS IN PARLIAMENT WAS MADE AT THE GENERAL Election in November, 1922. The Labour Party which for four years had asserted the right to a place on the front Opposition bench became unquestionably the second party in the State. In a House reduced, on the establishment of the Irish Free State from 707 to 615 members, the Conservatives secured a large majority, and Labour, with 140 seats, had more than the two sections of Liberals combined.

Ramsay MacDonald got the position which led to the Prime Ministership. For the first time since the war he was back in Parliament. Hitherto he had failed on account of the opprobrium which clung to him after his attacks on the war policy of the Government. He complained that he was misrepresented by those who regarded him as an extreme pacifist and charged him with throwing obstacles in the way of the prosecution of the war. As described by his biographer, Lord Elton, his argument was on these lines—mistaken though we were in entering the war, now we are in it we must win it, but we shall not win if we make a vindictive, militarist peace. If MacDonald was misunderstood the fault was partly his own. He displayed what Snowden described as facility in "dancing round the mulberry bush."

However that might be, MacDonald, on returning to Parliament, was elected leader of the Labour Party when as the second party in the State it saw its way to office. He was elected by a small majority over Clynes, with the support of the I.L.P., including most of the Clydeside extremists, who found afterwards that they had misjudged their man.

Clynes was naturally disappointed by the vote of the Labour Party, after his success in its leadership. I believe that if it had been his fate to become Prime Minister he would have filled the position with discretion and dignity. He had given proof of administrative capacity in the Ministry of Food; he was thoughtful and sedate; and a Balliol man could not use more correct English than the self-educated factory worker.

More than once Clynes had stood up to the extremists of his party. When he was leader they criticised him for accepting the invitation to Princess Mary's marriage. "It has never," he replied, "seemed necessary to me to behave like a boor in order to show that I belong to the working class." At a later time, when someone complained of his dining with Royalty, he pointed out that the Throne was part of the Constitution and declared that he felt greatly honoured by the invitation of the King.

As Labour was entitled to the rôle of His Majesty's Opposition, MacDonald claimed for its officers the whole of the front Opposition bench, but the Liberals had not abandoned hope of recovering their place in the State, and Asquith and other Privy Councillors in his party took seats on the front bench. Lloyd George preferred the corner below the gangway where he sat before he received office.

I was disturbed by the violent, revolutionary tone of the long series of maiden speeches which the new Socialist members hastened to deliver. The end of the world seemed to be threatened by their loud-voiced, vehement tirades. But gradually they inhaled the traditional atmosphere of Parliament.

Anatole France declared that Parliamentarianism corrupted and weakened Socialist action. Although it has not done that in our country, it has had a restraining influence. The newcomers, as a rule, adopted a less strident tone on finding that they were treated by other parties and classes on terms of equality. They lost the inferiority complex which made them assertive and defiant. There were on their benches a large body of quiet, rather stolid Trade Unionists, little interested in questions of high politics and concerned primarily with bigger wages and shorter hours, who exercised a calming influence; and MacDonald, himself a model of decorum, enjoined on his followers respect for the Chair. They were handled tactfully by Mr. Speaker Whitley, for whose friendly counsel they were grateful. As a rule, Labour members did not show the ready aptitude of the Irish Nationalists for Parliamentary tactics, but they could not be long in the House without learning its unwritten rules.

They found by experience many "Don'ts." Don't step between the member who is speaking and the Chair. Don't read or display a newspaper. Don't mention any member by name. Don't refer specifically to speeches or proceedings in the House of Lords. Whatever may be the changes in the House of Commons, the unwritten rules are maintained. Cries of "Order" arrest the offender. I recall the shouts that were raised when a member addressing the Chair stepped over the border of the matting along the side of the House; since the time when opponents were in danger of coming to blows lines were drawn within which they were confined. The House delighted in embarrassing the transgressor with its stentorian shouts. It did so when a member standing at the Bar put his foot an inch in advance of the purple line on the matting. "Bar! Bar!" cried the condemning voices. The actual wooden bar, by the way, was drawn on extremely rare occasions. I have seen it drawn when strangers were summoned to answer the charge of Breach of Privilege and when the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs came to present an Address.

For the worst disturbance in the Parliament of 1922 the Labour Opposition had a precedent in the Unionist record. It was provoked by the Government's attempt to set up again a motion, which had been defeated in a snap division. Labour members resisted this curt proceeding as fiercely as the Unionists resisted Asquith's attempt to

rescind a snap amendment on his Home Rule Bill. Protracted disorder held up business and compelled the Speaker to adjourn the House. A group of Socialists scandalized their own colleagues by singing "The Red Flag."

Meantime the tranquillity for which Bonar Law looked in his Election Address was not secured in the international sphere. There were difficulties over Reparations; the French occupation of the Ruhr strained the Entente Cordiale; and the future administration of Mesopotamia was among other grave problems.

The settlement of the war debt to the United States gave the Prime Minister much perplexity. Baldwin went to Washington to negotiate and strongly advised the Government to accept the terms offered by America for the funding of the debt. It was only after long discussion that Bonar Law acquiesced in the arrangement.

Bonar Law's Premiership lasted only seven months. The House liked "Bonner": he was so unpretentious, kindly and straightforward. He warned his party on his appointment that he might not be able to endure the strain indefinitely. Painful illness disabled him sooner than he or anyone else anticipated.

I was shocked by the evidence of throat malady in his voice at Easter, 1923. He was almost inaudible. He went abroad and reassuring reports in his absence inspired hope of his recovery. There was surprise in every quarter at the announcement of his resignation on Whit Sunday. Most of his colleagues were out of town. He took the step, at which the country grieved, on the urgent recommendation of his medical advisers; and he was too ill to tender his resignation personally to the King, who was at Aldershot. His death before the end of the year was for the sufferer a personal relief.

He was the first Prime Minister since Gladstone who was buried in Westminster Abbey.

For the first time in our history, a Peerage was a handicap in a statesman's way to the Prime Ministership. There were only two likely successors to Bonar Law, who made no recommendation on the subject to the King. As Austen Chamberlain's leadership had been repudiated by the party which overthrew the Coalition the choice for the highest office lay between Lord Curzon and Stanley Baldwin. Twice in my time a Peer was preferred by Queen Victoria to a Commoner. Northcote was disappointed in 1885 when Salisbury was chosen, and so was Harcourt in 1894 when Rosebery was chosen.

Political conditions in 1923 weighed against the Peer. It was obviously desirable in the interest of Parliamentary government that the Prime Minister should come in contact with His Majesty's Opposition, but the Labour party had scarcely any representatives in the House of Lords. Since then it has been often said that under modern conditions no Peer could attain the first place. A new rule to that effect, however, was not necessarily set by the Sovereign.

I assume that other factors were taken into account. It was ascertained that Baldwin would be more acceptable than Curzon to the men who were to carry on the Government. Curzon was difficult to live with in office. His career had been as distinguished as his talents; he was a well-informed, experienced statesman and a master of sonorous oratory. But although his friends said that he was shy and sensitive rather than haughty and his unbending physical deportment was due to the surgical support that he wore for spinal trouble, the "most superior person" of a

long surviving gibe attained the quizzing attribute of "The All-Highest." The strain on his nervous system caused by pain and excessive work was partly accountable for his want of consideration for those with whom he was officially associated. Montagu was influenced by personal feeling when he spoke of the "plaintive, hectoring, bullying, complaining letters which were so familiar to his colleagues and friends," but there is more impartial evidence of the idiosyncracies which prevented a splendid career from mounting to the top.

Even the most censorious persons, whom I met, felt sympathy with Curzon in his terrible disappointment when he came from Montacute, two days after Bonar Law's resignation, expecting to attain his supreme ambition, only to learn from the King's Private Secretary that His Majesty had sent for Baldwin. Nothing in his career won for him more honour than the dignified fortitude with which he bore his disappointment. At the meeting of the Conservative party he moved Baldwin's election as leader, with an eloquent appeal for unity, and he continued in office under the new Prime Minister, who only six years after setting foot on the official ladder was suddenly raised to the highest rung.

The House of Commons was pleased at the choice of Baldwin. He was a House of Commons man. The country knew little about him. It knew that he smoked a pipe, and it took him at his own value as an ordinary man. Only by flash-light glimpses did people see behind the façade. There came a time when his friends used affectionately to say—"Oh! Stanley is not so simple as he seems."

"S.B." reminded me in some respects of "C-B." He was, like Campbell-Bannerman, shrewd, jocular, pleasant-mannered and easy-tempered. His sense of the responsibility which fell on him was expressed in his response to the cheers of the crowd in Downing Street on his appointment as Prime Minister. "I need your prayers rather than your congratulations."

Baldwin's Government was practically the same as Bonar Law's. The principal Coalitionists were still kept out of office. There was so much opposition to Austen Chamberlain that the Prime Minister did not invite him; and Coalition colleagues stood by Austen.

Rigid Conservatives were perplexed when Baldwin turned for co-operation to McKenna, the Chairman of the Midland Bank. It transpired that Bonar Law had offered him office. McKenna did not see his way then to return to Downing Street, although at a City meeting he declared that in the welter of parties Bonar Law's Government offered the only prospect of stability. In that welter the last man whom the Liberal ex-Minister would have associated with officially was Lloyd George. They were not on good terms before the war and during its progress their relations deteriorated.

On being offered by Baldwin the office of Chancellor of the Exchequer, McKenna promised to take it conditionally on his recovery from illness. Three months later he withdrew the promise as he found he could not bear the strain of a contested election. There had been talk of a seat for McKenna in the City, but Sir Frederick Banbury who was expected to make way for him was in no hurry to leave the Commons.

Neville Chamberlain was in these circumstances appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. Unlike Austen, but like their father, he was trained in business and civic life. He played an active part in the City Council of Birmingham and became

Lord Mayor. He took special interest in health, housing and town planning. Instead of sharing the dislike of Conservatives to business enterprise by municipalities he took the initiative in transforming the bus company into a municipal enterprise and, as Socialists recalled to his credit, he founded the Birmingham Municipal Savings Bank. In the Bonar Law and Baldwin Government, although elected to Parliament only in 1918, Neville held several offices, and distinguished himself by administrative energy as Minister of Health.

In my diary, recording his first speech in that position, I note: "His head is shaped like his father's. He has dark hair, with a hint of grey at the side, and a dark moustache. Voice rather low. Too cool in manner but lucid. He pleases the House, without arousing enthusiasm."

It was not his fate at this stage of his career as Chancellor to open a Budget. The Government fell before its time came.

Baldwin boldly challenged the verdict of the country on Protection six months after he became Prime Minister. The risk to which he exposed the majority that he inherited from Bonar Law alarmed cautious followers.

I was told by a member of the Carlton Club that the language about him was lurid. But he acted honestly. He wished, in the imposition of duties on manufactured goods, to be set free from a pledge given by his predecessor.

Consultations took place between Baldwin and the leading Coalitionists in his party, with the view to their inclusion in a reconstructed Government. That still proved impracticable. It was rumoured that some of his colleagues threatened to resign if the Coalitionists received office. Meantime the Coalitionists acted with him on the platform only.

The Liberals were for the nonce united. Movements made for a year towards reunion had not been so far successful, but in resistance to Protection they fought on a common front. Lloyd George spoke for Asquith at Paisley, "unfeignedly glad to be on the same platform again."

The Poll in December, 1923, justified the fears of the Carlton Club. Some of the Conservatives taunted their leader with playing into the hands of the Socialists. That was the result of his action.

The Labour Party got office sooner than anyone anticipated. They mustered 191 members in the new Parliament and the Liberals 159. Together the two parties had a majority of fully 90 over the Conservatives. Ramsay MacDonald, with his knowledge of Constitutional practice, assumed that he would be sent for by the King, and soon we knew that he and his colleagues were prepared to take office.

That prospect terrified large classes of people who conjured up visions of revolutionary policy. In their alarm they turned for safety to the man whom a few years previously they scorned as "Wait and See." Asquith was, as he said, in turn cajoled, wheedled, almost caressed, taunted, threatened, browbeaten and all but blackmailed to step in as the saviour of Society. He was called on either to co-operate with Baldwin or to form a government of his own. But he held that if Labour was willing to assume the burdens of office it had an undoubted right to do so; and, as he remarked, it could hardly be tried under safer conditions than when it could be promptly turned out by a combination of the two other parties!

It was characteristic of Ramsay MacDonald that when his appointment as Prime Minister was imminent he went off to Lossiemouth and there drew up the draft of his Government instead of remaining in consultation with colleagues. This was an instance of the aloofness, of which they often complained. Even personal friends long acquainted with MacDonald found it difficult to get behind that veil. This or that man claimed to know him. I doubt if they did. They came in contact with him as a lover of books or an enthusiast for art, or a perfervid Scot, but there was a realm to which he invited no man's company. He retired to thoughts among which he dwelt alone. The result was that he seemed a mass of contradictions.

He wrote from Lossiemouth in acknowledgment of my congratulations. "It is very sad," he wrote, "that several of the old cronies have their eyes shut but, perhaps, they are mercifully spared—no one need envy me my job." MacDonald was extremely sensitive to the feeling of the people among whom he grew up and he took pleasure in recalling old characters, "men who thought for themselves, good, robust, radical thinking men, who feared God, were not afraid of work, and did their duty." No honour was sweeter to him than honour at home; nothing hurt him more during the war than his expulsion from the Moray Golf Club. That affront he attributed mainly to golfers from a distance. Although the expulsion was rescinded in 1929, he never condescended to play again on the home links; his eyes blazed when I asked if he was to do so.

The first time I heard MacDonald address a vast audience was at the Labour Party demonstration at the Royal Albert Hall on the eve of the meeting of Parliament in January, 1924. It was a jubilant demonstration of earnest men and women who looked forward to the early attainment of their hopes for a better world. They were proud of the man who was to lead them into the promised land. He was a great platform orator, eloquent and inspiring. I was impressed by his idealism and religious feeling. Others were equally impressed. A Liberal M.P. rang me up that night and asked if MacDonald was a religious man!

The Prince of Wales and the Duke of York were present in the House of Commons at the close of the debate on the Labour amendment of no-confidence in the Conservative Government. It was truly a historic occasion. The division in which the amendment was carried, with the aid of the Liberals, set the seal on the triumph of the new party.

The greatest prize within the reach of a British subject was won by a man of humbler origin than any previous Prime Minister. While he was conscious of the responsibilities and difficulties of the position the farm servant's son was conscious also of its glory.

When MacDonald was sent for by the King and received the commission to form a Government he was without any official experience. Till then he was not even a Privy Councillor. Several Labour colleagues held that status, and precedent would have been followed if MacDonald received it when leader of the Opposition. Gossips said that out of consideration for the feeling of extreme Socialists he had declined an honour which could come to him only through a Conservative Minister.

There was disdainful curiosity about the composition of the first Labour Government. It proved a hotch-potch affair, comprising men of various political antecedents, but it was not the monster which had troubled the dreams of the City.

Everyone wondered particularly how MacDonald was to give it a presentable appearance in the House of Lords. This he succeeded in doing. He found an experienced Lord Chancellor in Haldane, who became Chairman of the Committee of Imperial Defence; and nerves were further relieved when the Lord President of the Council was seen to be Lord Parmoor, a former Conservative M.P., who was placed on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council and created a Peer in the time of Asquith's Government, but who approved of MacDonald's peace views during the War. A still more tranquillising appointment was that of Viscount Chelmsford, ex-Viceroy of India, as First Lord of the Admiralty. Lord Chelmsford was detached from party politics.

Cynics smiled at the addition of three new Peers to the House which Socialists proposed to abolish. All had good cedentials for office—Lord Thomson, a distinguishing soldier who was on the Supreme War Council; Lord Olivier, a handsome aristocrat, who had been in the Colonial Service; and Lord Arnod who had been a Manchester stockbroker and a member of the Liberal party with experience as a Parliamentary Private Secretary. Lord Olivier was associated in the Fabian Society with Sidney Webb, the indefatigable investigator, now appointed President of the Board of Trade.

MacDonald, like Lord Salisbury, undertook with the Prime Ministership the office of Foreign Secretary. Arthur Henderson was sent to the Home Office. The deputy leadership of the House of Commons was entrusted to prudent Clynes. Unnecessary alarm was caused in the financial world by Snowden's appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. There was a bitter drop in his own gratification. Clynes, in order to be at hand for consultation with the Prime Minister on Parliamentary business, was put up at No. 11, Downing Street, the Chancellor's customary residence. It was rumoured that that arrangement was resented by Snowden as it had been in similar circumstances by Austen Chamberlain.

The appointment, for the first time, of a woman to office was regarded by men with good-natured tolerance. Miss Margaret Bondfield, as Secretary to the Ministry of Labour, led the way in this fresh advance by her sex. There were eight women in the new Parliament, and some of them set a new fashion by not wearing their hats in the House. Even in that respect they claimed equal freedom with men!

A social as well as a political revolution interested all familiar with Downing Street and Whitehall. The factory hand, the miner, the engine-cleaner occupied places which were previously, with rare exceptions, reserved for the upper and middle classes. No one except the snob was disposed to cavil at the change. There was rather a feeling of complacency at the widening of the opportunity to share in government and administration. One of the most interesting of the social revolutions was the appointment of James Brown, a miner, as Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. Willie Adamson, the Secretary for Scotland, had the credit for suggesting an appointment which proved successful. "Jimmy" Brown, a devout man, was a respected Member of Parliament.

When MacDonald took the place on the Treasury Bench where I had seen Gladstone, Balfour and Asquith, I felt acutely conscious of the political transformation which had occurred so suddenly. But MacDonald, with his handsome figure, fine head and stately bearing, did credit to the position, and he observed all its proprieties as if born to it.

Other members of the Government soon acquired the official technique. Murmurs were raised behind them when they spoke of "His Majesty's Government"; the revolutionaries would have substituted "The Labour Government," but the Ministers adhered to constitutional form. Their replies to questions were in the best Treasury Bench manner. They repeated the Asquithian tags: "every relevant consideration will be borne in mind"; "every avenue will be explored." When asked by a member if this or that was meant by an answer, they told the inquirer that the answer meant what it said! I was not surprised to hear from one who knew that the Labour Ministers conducted themselves at Privy Councils and Court functions with correctness and dignity.

There was an innovation which made me suspect that Labour Ministers would not be masters in their own House. A Committee of members was elected to act as a liaison between the Government and the rank-and-file. By this device pressure could be brought to bear upon the Ministers by men who had not their knowledge. It did not prove to the advantage of the Government.

The Ministerial novices got fair play from the older parties. Baldwin showed them every consideration. For him, in turn, MacDonald had smiles and gracious words. Perhaps the Labour leader calculated on the political world in the future being divided between the Conservative leader and himself. On the other hand he was grudging in recognition of the assistance that the Liberals gave him by speech and vote. The Liberals sat below the gangway on the Government side where the Labour party sat during the Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith administrations.

The enthusiasts who expected to see Socialism "in our time" were sorely disappointed. Instead of a new world they saw old policies. They were amazed by the decision of their Government to proceed with the Cruiser programme, which was a legacy from the Conservatives.

"What a difference it makes to your convictions when you cross the floor of the House," Radical Pringle exclaimed, as he glanced at the Ministers. It was to their credit that, like Gladstone, they could in office take an attitude different from what they took in "a position of greater freedom and less responsibility." A revolt against the Naval programme was threatened by intransigent Labour members, but it was quelled by the Prime Minister in a speech cheered by the Conservatives.

Snowden's Budget was on orthodox Treasury lines. Asquith described it as a sound financial Budget. Labour members were disappointed because it did not carry out their projects of social amelioration. The miracle of the loaves and fishes, Snowden declared, was a trivial thing in comparison with what they expected him to perform. Give us time, he pleaded. That was a plea at which the impatient sighed.

MacDonald, following the practice of Balfour and Asquith, spent little time in the House except to answer questions or to follow a debate in which he was directly concerned. He was busily occupied with international affairs, and established a European reputation by the Allied Conference in London on German Reparations; but he did not supervise the work of colleagues. He suffered by not keeping in touch with his party.

I have often heard complaints that Prime Ministers did not consort freely with faithful followers. In MacDonald's case his aloofness caused sharp displeasure. Even official colleagues had few opportunities of meeting him except in Cabinet.

He did not hurry from London so frequently as Lord Salisbury, but colleagues complained of his spending week-ends apart from them at Chequers, the house presented to the nation for the use of Prime Ministers by Lord Lee of Fareham. It was said that he was not even on speaking terms with some of them.

Many defeats were borne submissively by the Government. The Prime Minister declared that it would not remain in office five minutes after it was deprived of its sense of dignity. Its pride was not hurt when it was repulsed on minor matters, but at last it was fatally discredited on two major questions. The Anglo-Soviet Treaties, with the conditional guarantee of a loan of unfixed amount to a distrusted régime, provoked a storm. It seemed that on this subject the Prime Minister yielded to pressure from the Left Wing of his followers. The Treaties were signed a few days after the breakdown of the negotiations about them had been announced; and the intimation of that definite step surprised some members of the Cabinet.

There was a still sharper Parliamentary sensation. The immediate cause of the Government's debacle was the withdrawal of the prosecution of a journalist for an alleged seditious article in a Communist paper. The Government was charged with tampering with the processes of law for political reasons. An opportunity for explanation was offered by the Liberals. When the Conservatives tabled a motion of censure, the Liberals proposed that the matter should be referred to a Select Committee. Inquiry into all the circumstances might, they thought, exonerate the Government from the charge against it. But MacDonald's anger was aroused by an imputation on Ministerial integrity. He spurned the proposal of the Liberals and when he was defeated in the House of Commons he appealed indignantly to the country.

No Prime Minister since Gladstone in 1886 had, on a defeat in Parliament, claimed and obtained a dissolution. Others resigned at once. MacDonald decided to put his case to the Electors. It was rumoured that Henderson, the ablest political strategist in the Government—he was away at Geneva—disapproved of that decision.

Passion was let loose in the contest. It was inflamed by the notorious "Red Letter," the letter from the Third International at Moscow, attributed to Zinoviev, inciting British Communists to armed insurrection. This mysteriously disclosed document cast discredit on the Socialists who had signed the Treaties with the Soviet and it settled the fate of the Labour Government.

MacDonald's first great adventure was ended. It lasted nine months. The reins passed again into Baldwin's hands. Conservatives got a majority of 211 over other parties.

Labour, although defeated, established itself more firmly than before as the second party in the State. Liberals of the two sections were reduced to a paltry 40. They were relegated to two of the back benches, below the Opposition gangway, for many years occupied by the Irish Nationalists.

The slings and arrows of misfortune fell again on Asquith. He was defeated in Paisley by Rosslyn Mitchell, a solicitor, who adorned the Labour Party by his eloquence. Life-long opponents poured the balm of sympathy on the wound of the statesman who was always touched by personal kindness. They were conscious of the loss that the House suffered by his exclusion. To himself it was a painful wrench.

"It is a bereavement to me to have seen the last of the House of Commons," he wrote in a letter that I received from "H. H. A." when, after a holiday in Egypt and Palestine, he accepted the Peerage which was offered to him by the King. In the House of Lords the Earl of Oxford and Asquith had friends on both sides. The Earl of Balfour and Earl Beauchamp, the leader of the Liberal Peers, were his introducers.

He forgot that he had to make obeisance in presenting his writ to the Lord Chancellor. Only when prompted by Garter King-at-Arms did he bend a knee.

## CHAPTER XVII

### BALDWIN'S GOVERNMENT

*Churchill Surprise—Another Blow for Curzon—Locarno—General Strike—A Great Lawyer—Asquith Quarrels with Lloyd George—Resigns Leadership—Dawdling in Division Lobby—Socialist Disorder—Closure of Lords—Trade Disputes Act—A Labour Loss.*

AFTER THREE ELECTIONS IN THREE SUCCESSIVE YEARS PARLIAMENT SETTLED DOWN IN 1924 to a normal span of life, with a party Government under a Conservative Prime Minister. A tremendously long speech from the throne provided it with abundant material for its consideration. The King took sixteen minutes to read the speech.

Baldwin's second Government was much stronger than his first. Fortified by the country's confidence, he followed his own conciliatory inclination and took into the Cabinet the leading Conservative Coalitionists.

In one respect he imitated MacDonald. He gave office to a woman. The Duchess of Atholl became Parliamentary Secretary to the Board of Education.

I found surprise in every quarter at Churchill's appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. He himself shared the surprise. The office was expected to be given to Sir Robert Horne or Neville Chamberlain, both of whom had held it previously. Robert Horne did not take any other office; Neville Chamberlain got again, at his own desire, congenial occupation in the Ministry of Health.

Churchill had been tentatively turning back to his first political love. He had aimed at the formation of a Centre Party. He was defeated as a Liberal and as an Independent opponent of Socialism, but, after exclusion from Parliament for two years, he found a seat as a Constitutional, under Conservative auspices. Subsequently he rejoined the Carlton Club, from which he withdrew in his early years. He acquiesced in the Baldwin system of modified Protection.

Lord Curzon, who was so profoundly disappointed on being passed over for the Prime Ministership, suffered another blow when the Foreign Office, which he had occupied in several régimes, was given to Austen Chamberlain. For the few months of life that remained to him he continued, as Lord President of the Council, to lead the House of Lords. A conspicuous gap was made there by his death. He had been a dazzling figure since his return twenty years previously from India, where his Viceroyalty ended abruptly with his quarrel with Kitchener.

Austen Chamberlain's appointment as Foreign Secretary was well received.\* Within a brief period he had been offered the Indian Viceroyalty and the Paris Embassy and sounded about Washington, but he preferred to remain at the centre of affairs. His Foreign Secretaryship was made memorable by the Locarno Treaties with the guarantee by Britain and Italy to France and Belgium against German aggression, and to Germany against French and Belgian aggression; Rhineland was still to be de-militarized. The initiative, encouraged by Lord d'Abernon, our Ambassador in Berlin, came from Dr. Stresemann, the German Chancellor; and Austen Chamberlain carried out the project in spite of French suspicions and objections at first by some of his own Cabinet colleagues.

For the achievement which gave bright hope of settlement in Europe he deserved the Order of the Garter, an honour rarely held by a Commoner. That bright hope was dramatically displayed when the Foreign Secretary and the German Ambassador drank from the Loving Cup at the Guildhall Banquet. It was strengthened when Germany became a full member of the League of Nations, with a permanent seat on the Council, and again when Stresemann signed the Kellogg Pact for the renunciation of war as an instrument of national policy. Our own forces, as stated in the King's Speech, had been reduced to "the lowest point consistent with national safety."

Civil strife now tested the efficiency of Government and Parliament. Industrial trouble had been foreseen by Baldwin. He tried to avert it and to promote a spirit of conciliation and fellowship among different classes.

I recall the afternoon when he thrilled the House with the prayer "Give peace in our time, O Lord." A Bill aimed at the political levy of Trade Unions was introduced by Conservatives in 1925, but Baldwin advised his followers—and they took his advice—not to fire the first shot. He spoke in a homely strain and then with deep feeling came the prayer—such as few other men, except Bright, could have ventured to utter. But a trial of strength was soon made by the Trade Unions who believed that right and might were on their side. Sir Douglas Hogg, the Attorney-General, put into the Prime Minister's mouth the words: "I labour for peace, but when I speak unto them thereof they make them ready to battle."

A challenge to constitutional rule was thrown down in 1926 when, on the failure of negotiations in the mining dispute, the General Council of the Trade Union Congress ordered the General Strike, with the connivance of the Labour party. I felt no doubt of MacDonald's personal dislike of this revolutionary action, but he acquiesced in it. The mass of citizens took the side of lawful authority and defeated the strike by enduring with good temper the inconvenience and discomfort that it caused.

The House of Commons had emotional moments and jarring incidents, but on the whole it watched calmly and solemnly the course of the bloodless civil war. On the occasions of important announcements it was crowded with members, Peers and strangers. The Prince of Wales and the Duke of York came day after day.

A dramatic effect was produced by Sir John Simon's exposure of the unconstitutional and unlawful character of the strike, and of the liabilities that it imposed on all who advised it or broke their contract of employment. Labour members affected at first to laugh at or ignore the great lawyer's contention but soon it worked its way into the minds of the men directly concerned. Along with the judgment

delivered by Mr. Justice Astbury, Sir John's speech contributed largely to the collapse of the strike. The supremacy of Government and Parliament was proved when after nine anxious days, the strike was called off unconditionally.

Baldwin's prestige was now at its peak. Although he had a personal triumph in the monarchical crisis ten years later, I don't think that he ever stood so high politically as at the defeat of the General Strike.

Sir John Simon at the same crisis attained a position in Parliament which he never held before. Henceforth he stood in the front rank.

The breach between Lord Oxford and Lloyd George was widened beyond repair by the General Strike. Lord Oxford justified the action of the Government. He declared in *The British Gazette*, the official emergency paper in charge of Churchill, that the strike was directly aimed at the daily life of the community and that the anti-social weapon must be sheathed before the mining negotiations were resumed. Lloyd George, on the other hand, criticised the Government's procedure in the negotiations.

Their differences were brought to a decisive point by Lord Oxford's publication of his letter stating that Lloyd George's conduct in absenting himself from the council of his colleagues was incompatible with political friendship. To that censure Lloyd George, who never turned the other cheek to the smiter, made a combative reply, and this in turn was followed by a sharp rejoinder from Lord Oxford.

Nothing like their quarrel had occurred since Lord John Russell dismissed Palmerston from office and "Pam" gave a tit-for-tat by dismissing Lord John's Government. A letter was addressed to Lord Oxford by his principal friends, including Grey, Simon, Runciman, Buckmaster and Buxton, assuring him of their unreserved support. But a Peer could not lead a party unless he had its full confidence and the cordial co-operation of its leader in the House of Commons.

At this crisis, Lord Oxford had a serious illness. He told me that he lay in bed like a vegetable for six consecutive days and got through an enormous allowance of sleep. His health was restored at Castle Howard, as the guest of Geoffrey Howard, but he could no longer count upon it as he had done all his life before; and, whether well or ill, he declined to engage in sectional controversy in his party.

He resigned its leadership in October, 1926, and became for the first time for twenty years a private individual. In that capacity he was treated by the Peers with a full share of the respect which they show to all distinguished men in their House.

Lloyd George was elected, by a majority, Chairman of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons and his authority in the country naturally grew after Lord Oxford's resignation, but although there had been a rapprochement between the two sections the party was never cordially reunited in or out of Parliament. The fusion of personalities and funds proved impracticable.

Rival tabernacles were occupied by Lloyd Georgians and those who had stood by Asquith, with Grey as the principal priest of the latter, but diversity or liberty of faith did not save the party from secessions. Some of the eminent men who had served under Lloyd George joined the Conservative party; some valiant fighters went over to the Labour camp.

There were many disorderly scenes in 1926. The most strenuous fight in recent years was waged, with successive all-night sittings, on the proposal in the Economy Bill for the reduction of the state contribution to Health Insurance.

Dawdling in the Lobby was an obstructive device practised by the Labour Party. It was adopted a quarter of a century previously by Lord Hugh Cecil and Earl Percy. In that way they prevented a division being taken within the allotted time on the Bill for marriage with a deceased wife's sister. Now Labour obstructives went into the lobby but refused to pass the tellers and consequently the counting of the votes could not be completed. For that manœuvre thirteen members were suspended. It was repeated on other occasions but eventually defeated by the Chair directing, after a reasonable interval, that the tellers should report the votes so far recorded.

The mining dispute which continued for months after the General Strike was the most protracted and ruinous industrial dispute in the history of the country. Feeling mounted high over the Bill to permit an eight-hour working day for the miners. Labour members accused Baldwin of hypocrisy in violating his declared intention to promote good will in industry. Some of them became so disorderly that MacDonald dissociated himself from their conduct.

Closure in the House of Lords was introduced at the last stage of the Bill. Socialist Peers protracted the proceedings by speeches of enormous length, and cries of "divide," rarely heard in that orderly and polite assembly, failed to silence them. At last Lord Salisbury moved "that the question be now put."

I remember on more than one occasion a motion that a Peer "be no longer heard." But this was the first time that the Closure, as known to the Commons, was applied in the House of Lords.

The more unruly of the Labour members vented their anger when Black Rod came to summon the Commons for the Royal Commission which was to give the Royal Assent to the Act that had caused so much feeling. They stood up and shouted as the dignified official advanced to the table and delivered his message. A "gross indignity," the Speaker called their behaviour. Some of them carried disorder to the House of Lords itself. In the Gallery and at the Bar as they watched the final ceremony they muttered and coughed and hissed.

Bitter feeling was excited in the Labour Party also by the Trade Disputes Bill. As it was designed to prevent General Strikes it revived disagreeable memories; and it provoked intense controversy about the powers of Trade Unions in the future. Sir Douglas Hogg (afterwards Lord Hailsham), in piloting the Bill, confronted stiff resistance by the Trade Unionists.

I don't suggest that the Labour members, as a rule, were more disorderly than the older parties. Exasperated by the failure of the General Strike they behaved as Liberals and Conservatives behaved when their interests were challenged.

One of the ablest of the Labour members was John Wheatley. A leader of the Left Wing, he showed administrative capacity and force as Minister of Health. Later he dissociated himself from his Front Bench and took an independent, forward part in Labour activities. A Clydesider of Irish parentage, he was brought up in a slum and worked in coal mines, but with business ability he became a publisher in Glasgow. Wheatley looked as benignant as Pickwick, with eyes twinkling through spectacles, and he had an excellent Parliamentary manner. He was a forceful debater, concentrating his interest with passionate sympathy on rent, housing and other social questions. By his death in middle age, the Labour Party lost a strong personality.

## CHAPTER XVIII

### THE NEW AGE

*Dominion Gallery—The India Commission—Air Minister's Flight to Delhi—The "Flappers" Vote—John Buchan—Authors in the Commons—The New Calendar—Prayer Book Oratory—Churchill Finance—Jokes About Money—Chamberlain the Third—Tory Leadership—Veterans Pass Away—Memories of Lord Oxford—Political Catchwords.*

I WAS IMPRESSED BY THE RANGE OF GOVERNMENT ACTIVITIES IN THE LATER NINETEEN-Twenties. They did not satisfy impatient reformers, but they indicated the progressive, open-minded spirit of the Conservatives who held unchallenged power. In that transition age there were many notable new developments, imperial and domestic.

In the House of Commons I was interested to see a side gallery allotted to representatives of the Dominions. No longer were they crowded among strangers or foreign diplomats. Their special gallery was a symbol of their new Constitutional position. The relationship of the Dominions and Great Britain, as defined by the Imperial Conference, which adopted the name of British Commonwealth of Nations instead of British Empire, became that of autonomous communities within the Commonwealth, equal in status and united by allegiance to the Crown. Instead of Governors-General being the official channel of communication, direct contact between the Governments of the Dominions and Downing Street was established.

A step towards self-government in India was taken, while Lord Birkenhead was Secretary of State, by the appointment of the Statutory Commission. To an inquiry of exceptional magnitude involving long visits to India, Sir John Simon gave his services as Chairman and devoted practically two years of his life.

The increased range of State control over life and trade produced a mass of legislation. Members who groaned under its load thought with envy of the far-off days when domestic legislation was dismissed in the speech from the Throne with the announcement: "Various measures of public utility will be submitted to your consideration."

Goschen used to tell an amusing story of his interview with Palmerston when chosen to second the Address in 1864. After listening to the Premier's exposition of foreign affairs the young man ventured to ask: "And with regard to domestic legislation what am I to say?" "Well, you know," Palmerston replied, "we have been adding a great many laws to the Statute Book every year and we can't go on doing that. I think we have almost done enough. A little law reform, a little bankruptcy legislation, etc." (cheerfully rubbing his hands). "I think that will do." It would not do now.

Measures for national development and social reform accompanied in Baldwin's time the protection of industries against foreign competition. A Bill, not welcomed by all Conservatives, set up a Central Board to co-ordinate the supply of electricity. Science was spanning the world with quicker communication. Wireless telephonic service was inaugurated in 1927 between London and New York. Parliament was

thrilled by the flight of Sir Samuel Hoare, the Air Minister, to Delhi. It was proudly recorded that he arrived exactly to time—in thirteen days. In the social sphere our system of State insurance was gradually extended.

Equal electoral rights for the two sexes were recognised at last in 1928, when the franchise was extended to women at the age of twenty-one. The giving of the vote to "flappers" was derided by large sections of the Press and of Parliament, but although many Conservatives reproached Baldwin with the proposal and absented themselves from the division on the Second Reading of the Bill, only ten members carried their opposition to the lobby.

Joynson-Hicks (afterwards Lord Brentford), the Home Secretary, who had in a previous era defeated Churchill in Manchester, was in charge of the "Flappers' Bill." A jaunty, boisterous figure in frock-coat, "Jix" was loved by the cartoonist, and throughout his stormy career was much in the public eye. His leadership of the Evangelical Laity in the Church was combined with strenuous political activities. The Bolshevik "menace" received his vigilant attention and he conducted in his most lively manner the notorious and short-sighted raid in the City on the premises of Arcos, the official Soviet trading organisation. Although storms were raised in Parliament by his party pugilism, his good temper and easy manner disarmed critics. "Jix" was better liked by the House and was more successful than colleagues of higher political reputation.

The "reform" of the House of Lords haunted the Government. Right-Wing Conservatives urged it to take advantage of its large majority in order to restore to the Peers some of their lost power and provide a safe-guard against Socialist legislation. Lord Chancellor Cave embodied the Ministerial views in a series of suggestions. Defects in the Parliament Act, particularly in relation to the Finance Bill, were to be remedied and the constitution of the House of Lords was to be made more representative. Sketch proposals were prudently submitted by the Prime Minister to the House of Commons for ventilation. In the atmosphere of that House their existence was brief.

John Buchan destroyed the scheme in a brilliant Maiden Speech. However desirable reform might be, it could be carried out only if there was agreement, and the debate proved that that could not then be obtained. The younger Conservatives did not see the need of new devices against Socialist revolution and were not disposed to tamper rashly with the Parliament Act. They applauded John Buchan's appeal to respect the spirit of the Constitution. Churchill stated blandly that, if no agreement could be reached, the Government would bear its disappointment with what fortitude it might. No great call on its fortitude was required for the shelving of the vexed question.

The achievement of John Buchan (later Lord Tweedsmuir) on this occasion did not induce him to play an assiduous rôle in Parliament. He was not prepared to spend on its benches the necessary time. Members who did not know him intimately thought him aloof in manner. It is true he had no taste or leisure for Lobby chatter. When he arrived at the House he went straight to the Library. He brought many good stories from Oxford to the Smoking Room, and there he charmed friends with his genial humour. Now and again he made thoughtful

contributions to debate on subjects on which he was well informed and in which he was specially interested. In spite of the Scottish pulpit sing-song, from which even with the aid of Oxford he could not escape, he was an effective if not a graceful speaker, and the House heard him with the attention and respect due to his fine character and literary distinction.

There are few authors in Parliament nowadays. In previous times there was a large and distinguished number. I do not go back beyond my own experience for a list of historians, biographers, novelists, essayists. There were at the beginning of this century, Lecky, Anson and Butcher; Bryce, Morley, Trevelyan, Justin McCarthy and Birrell; A. E. W. Mason, Hilaire Belloc and Gilbert Parker. But all successful authors are no more successful in Parliament than all successful barristers.

The Commons were required by the increase of their work to reform their calendar. There were now fewer representatives of the class which regulated its movements by the London "Season" and sport, and old habits were altered without much objection. By meeting in November instead of February, and clearing off initial matters before Christmas, Parliament made progress with legislation early in the Session and lessened the block of business before the Budget; and by adjourning at the end of July instead of drifting into autumn working-class members got their holidays with their families.

A constitutional change was of great convenience to Ministers and would-be Ministers. Formerly a member who accepted an office of profit under the Crown was required to seek re-election. That requirement was inconvenient and even hazardous to men with small majorities. The official career of some rising Ministers was wrecked by their failure to obtain a seat on promotion to the Cabinet. Relief was given to such men and to the Prime Minister in his choice of colleagues by the abolition of the old rule in 1926.

The debates on the Revised Prayer Book, presented by the Church Assembly, were, in their depth of feeling and sustained eloquence, among the finest I have heard. Members were proud to have a great subject discussed in a manner worthy of the best Parliamentary tradition. Extraordinary interest was displayed in it in both Houses.

I never before saw such a long queue of strangers as assembled to hear the debate in the House of Lords. There was in the crowd a large proportion of women and clergymen. Peeresses filled the side galleries and also the alcoves above the Throne.

Oratorical power of the highest quality was revealed in the House of Commons. Sir Thomas Inskip, the distinguished lawyer and devout Low-Churchman, and Sir William Joynson-Hicks rose above themselves in the fervour and eloquence with which from the Government bench, in disagreement with their chief, they denounced the proposed Measure. Feeling was excited specially by the question of the Reservation of the Sacrament. The Prime Minister's influence failed in a free vote of the House. The Measure had been, with the benediction of nearly all the Bishops, approved by a large majority of the Peers. A close, exciting division resulted in its rejection by the Commons.

I glanced with sympathy at the aged Primate (Dr. Davidson) in the Gallery. He looked weary and sad when he moved away after the disappointment of his hopes.

An amended Measure, with changes intended to remove misunderstandings, suffered in the next Session the same fate as the first. The changes failed to conciliate opponents who contended that the new Prayer Book authorised doctrines and services which departed from the Reformation settlement.

Whatever position Churchill might occupy, he was sure with his lively mind and oratorical power to draw a large share of Parliamentary attention upon himself. He did so as Chancellor of the Exchequer. His financial statements excited not only the customary curiosity of Budget Day but also the piquant personal interest which accompanied him from youth to maturity. Several occupied well over two hours. The longest in 1928, including a chapter on rating relief to productive industry, lasted from 3.40 to 5.50 and after a tea interval for fifty minutes more.

Gladstone would not have taken an interval nor would his audience have thought of it, but members in these latter days were not disposed to listen, so long as previous generations, even to fine orations. When Ramsay MacDonald suggested a rest for the Chancellor, as Balfour did on a notorious occasion for Lloyd George, Churchill was ready to go on if the House wished, but the Chairman of Committee gathered the voices to be for tea.

As a rule, Churchill's speeches on Finance were rhetorical triumphs. They provided, as his faithful friend, Lloyd George, said of one of them, an extraordinarily brilliant entertainment.

"I don't like jokes about money," a City man remarked to a friend on leaving the House after that sort of entertainment. But Churchill was irrepressible. The House took delight in his controversies with Snowden, his immediate predecessor and immediate successor at the Treasury. The two hard hitters hammered one another year after year, and both enjoyed the process and kept perfect temper.

Churchill, as he himself complacently said, was one of the most scolded Chancellors. His return to the Gold Standard was lamented in many quarters in after years. He took off or reduced taxes and devised new taxes. "Ingenious" was the term applied to many of his Budget proposals. He disappointed people who expected miracles, but when reproached with failure to secure economy he laid the blame on the General Strike and the Coal Stoppage. He looked back with some measure of satisfaction to his *lustrum* at the head of the Treasury, noting that the consuming power of the people was encouraged and that strong new resources of wealth were "left to fructify" in their pockets.

If the Conservatives had taken Churchill into the sanctuary of their heart this would have been the opportunity for him to win leadership. He was Baldwin's sword-arm, as Asquith had been Campbell-Bannerman's, and he complied with Disraeli's ideal of the man to wind up a debate. But though he captured the cheers of the party which he had rejoined he did not fully secure its confidence.

Neville Chamberlain, on the other hand, was growing steadily in favour. Not only did he prove an able administrator at the Ministry of Health but he also displayed Parliamentary skill in piloting the Rating and Valuation Act and the Act for the reform of local government. Like his father, he took close personal interest in the housing problem. He had another congenial duty, with money provided by Churchill, in lowering the old-age pension age to 65 and introducing pensions to widows of insured persons and orphans. Although supposed to be a cold man he gave evidence of warm sympathies. He was deeply moved in urging the need of

nursing for poor mothers at child-birth. His sympathy on that subject was stirred by the family record. Austen's mother died at his birth, and Neville's mother died on giving birth to a child six years after he himself was born.

Before the last Conservative Government of my time ended its long career Neville Chamberlain, staunch in his political faith and fearless in proclaiming it, was recognised by his party as a potential leader on whom it could rely though he did not arouse enthusiasm.

Sir Austen Chamberlain was still the second man in the Government, but he was seldom seen in the House except during questions and debate on international affairs. Troubles for him sprang up in various parts of the world. Anxiety was caused and military precautions were required by the civil war in China and the anti-British agitation there; Soviet revolutionary propaganda led to the termination of the trade agreement, and the severance of diplomatic relations with Russia. These and many other questions involved Austen in controversy.

Among his critics was Lloyd George who, he observed, was a great War Minister but not equally successful as a Peace Minister! Austen's long and arduous term at the Foreign Office imposed a strain on his health, and he lost his grip on the House.

Gossips, after Baldwin had been a few years in office, indulged in the quest for his successor. He protested now and again that he was tired, and a Right-Wing set wished him to seek repose. But the time for that was a long way off.

This or that colleague was meanwhile talked of in the Lobby as a possible successor. There was, for instance, Sir Douglas Hogg. He had the qualities of a fighting leader. Bridgeman, a shrewd, cheery man, a popular Parliamentarian and reliable administrator, also was looked on with favour for a place to which he did not aspire. Before the Conservative régime ended in 1929 the gossips had to talk of others. Douglas Hogg went to the Woolsack and Bridgeman also accepted a Peerage.

Lord Robert Cecil ("Bob Cecil" in familiar talk even when he became Viscount Cecil of Chelwood) seemed at various periods destined for the highest place. Strong character distinguished the statesman whose great forehead and stooping shoulders and indifference to dress reminded me of his father. He was greatly respected but was too independent for everyday political life. Baldwin saw in him a mixture of the knight and the priest and suggested that if a cowl were placed round the face painted by Philip de Laszlo we would see a Savonarola. In another age Viscount Cecil would have gone to the stake for his convictions. He left several Governments on account of differences with their policy; he moved away from the party warfare in which he had attained a conspicuous place. He gave eminent service to Geneva and was as zealous in the championship of the League of Nations Union, as he had been in the promotion of the League.

Several statesmen prominent in my time passed away during the Baldwin régime. Besides Lord Oxford, who died in 1928, and Lord Curzon whose death I have already mentioned, the obituary list contained the long-familiar name of Lord George Hamilton who was a young man of promise in Disraeli's time and held office in successive Conservative Governments until he resigned on account of Balfour's flirting with Protection. A Liberal veteran, Sir George Trevelyan, the eminent author, who began his official career in Gladstone's first Government in 1868, died long after he had ceased to play an active part in political life. Lord

Haldane who belonged to a later generation of Liberals closed his distinguished career a year before the Labour party, to which he transferred his services, had the second opportunity of forming a Government.

It was an honour for me to be associated with Lord Oxford in the preparation of his books. Scores of letters initialled "H.H.A." or later "O." testify to the privilege that I enjoyed, beginning with *The Genesis of the War*. In the preface to *Fifty Years of Parliament* the author paid a flattering tribute to my knowledge of political history and capacity for research. His executors similarly acknowledged the help that I gave him in the *Memoirs and Reflections*, which were published shortly after his death.

I spent many hours with Lord Oxford in his study in Bedford Square, exploring boxes full of papers. Occasionally I visited him at "The Wharf" in that gem of villages, as Rosamund Nugent in *Cobweb Palace* calls Sutton Courtney.

Sparing use was made by Lord Oxford of his mass of papers. He put aside some which a journalist would have been eager to publish, and notably the list of men whose names might have been submitted to the King in the event of a creation of Peers becoming necessary in the constitutional crisis. To this list, compiled tentatively by the Whip and published by Lord Oxford's biographers, I have referred in a previous page.

I was impressed, as members who sat with him in Parliament were, by his consideration for his colleagues. He was always careful of their credit. In talk he touched lightly on their idiosyncracies. He spoke, with an affectionate smile, of Morley's repeated offers of resignation and surprise when at last his resignation of the India Office was accepted. Another member of his Cabinet—not one of those who left him in 1916—was, Lord Oxford acidly observed, a curious psychological study.

Scarcely ever did he utter a resentful word about the colleagues who deserted him. He refused when Prime Minister to believe in a movement to undermine his authority. A member of his Cabinet, John Burns, said to me after his death that it was a sign of weakness on his part to close his eyes and ears to what was evident to others. He thought no evil. Instead of crediting a story of intrigue, he thought poorly of the man who told it.

About his political opponents I never heard from him a bitter word. He remained on terms of personal friendship not only with Balfour but also, for instance, with Carson and Birkenhead. Carson dined with him a few weeks after the publication of his *Fifty Years of Parliament*, and "had not a word of complaint to make about it." Birkenhead supported his candidature, instead of Lord Cave's, for the Chancellorship of Oxford University.

Lord Oxford was greatly interested in political catchwords and I had a congenial task in tracing the origin of some of those appended to his *Fifty Years*. At his suggestion I drew up a list; he omitted the more commonplace and substituted others.

One notorious phrase baffled our research. Gladstone likened to "The Chapel Bell" the effect on the public conscience of the Clerkenwell prison explosion and other Fenian outrages. The phrase was often in my time brought up against its author by Conservatives. When and where it was used by Gladstone we could not discover. Lord Oxford consulted T. P. O'Connor and other Irishmen without success. I wrote William O'Brien and Swift MacNeill but, familiar though they were with the phrase—a stock quotation in Ireland—neither could help me.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Later I found that when someone in the House of Commons declared that the Clerkenwell outrage brought about the disestablishment of the Church of Ireland, Gladstone said that Clerkenwell had no more to do with the disestablishment of the Church than the ringing of the Chapel bell.

The description of the English Parliament as the Mother of Parliaments was an error, committed even by prominent politicians, which annoyed Lord Oxford. He would protest with emphasis against the misrendering of a historic phrase. "England, the Mother of Parliaments," was what John Bright said.

It was in a quizzing spirit that Lord Oxford exposed more pardonable ignorance. He stumped me, like other Jane Austenites, by asking what was the Christian name of Darcy in *Pride and Prejudice*. The range of his minute information was extraordinary. I give one instance. There was a controversy in the *Sunday Times* about the "long, unlovely street." That, he promptly remarked, was, of course, Wimpole Street, where the Hallams lived at No. 67. Arthur Hallam used to say "You will find us at Sixes and Sevens."

With the last communication that I received from "The Wharf," Lord Oxford sent me "diaristic" matter and among it his letters to Mrs. Harrisson. Like John Wesley and J. M. Barrie, he wrote, it has been said, his best letters to women. In his last illness he was concerned about the necessary material for his "Memories," and as he had not regularly kept a diary he found the letters useful. They were lent to him by their recipient. He extracted and got typed a considerable number of passages, and I added a few others. Through his private secretary, Vivian Phillipps, after his death I returned the bundle to, I think, Mrs. Harrisson herself. They were a few years later edited by Desmond MacCarthy and published in two series under the title: *H.H.A. Letters from the Earl of Oxford and Asquith to a Friend.*"

## CHAPTER XIX

### MACDONALD'S SECOND PREMIERSHIP

*New Electioneering—Labour Party Success—Woman in the Cabinet—Hustling Diplomacy—Snowden's Popularity—India's Status—Sir Oswald Mosley—Seizure of the Mace—Admonition—MacDonald's Friends—Herbert Morrison's Achievement—Lord Balfour Dead—Author's Gallery Jubilee—Liberals and their Leader—"L.G." and Sir John Simon—Conservative Revolt—A Disraelian Tory.*

IN THE GENERAL ELECTION OF 1929, WHEN BALDWIN APPEALED TO THE COUNTRY for the renewal of his mandate, more people than ever before heard the voices of candidates and especially of leaders. The motor-car had become familiar. Evelyn Cecil (Lord Rockley) was the first candidate (in 1898 when he won East Herts) to employ a car for electioneering. In the new century it had been used to an increasing extent in conveying the orator from hall to hall. Now there were other electioneering devices. Not only were there the B.B.C. broadcasts, but microphones and loudspeakers carried the voices to immense audiences. Every candidate, by the way, had an eye on the newly enfranchised young women, no longer disdainfully called "flappers." To what extent they affected the Election I cannot say.

For the first time the Labour Party, although it did not secure a majority over the others, became the largest party in the State. Labour won 289 seats, Conservatives 260, Liberals 58.

After the first humiliating adventure the Socialists vowed that never again would they take office in a minority. But when the second opportunity came, they grasped it. Ramsay MacDonald readily accepted the King's commission to form a Government.

The Prime Minister, although his own interest lay specially in international affairs, entrusted the Foreign Office to Arthur Henderson. Gossip said he had been inclined to give that office to J. H. Thomas, but Henderson insisted on it; Snowden with the position again of Chancellor of the Exchequer and now with the residence at No. 11 Downing Street, which he did not obtain formerly, was deputy-leader of the Commons. MacDonald, Snowden, Henderson, Clynes (Home Secretary) and Thomas (Lord Privy Seal and Minister of Employment) made up the big Five on the Treasury bench.

Three of the leading Socialist figures in future years, Arthur Greenwood, Herbert Morrison, and A. V. Alexander, received important office. C. R. Attlee was meantime occupied on the India Commission, but entered the Government in 1930. Lord Justice Sankey was appointed Lord Chancellor and Lord Parmoor became leader of the House of Lords. His son, Sir Stafford Cripps, who embarrassed his party at a later stage by his independence, served in the second year of the Government's existence as Solicitor-General. Distinction and debating power were added to the Treasury Bench by Sir William Jowitt's acceptance of the Attorney-Generalship. As he had been returned as a Liberal his new Socialist alignment caused much stir, particularly in his former party; but he submitted himself to his constituents and was re-elected.

A woman for the first time attained Cabinet rank and became a Privy Councillor. This honour fell to Miss Bondfield, who held a junior office in the previous Labour Government. She was appointed Minister of Labour.

A new breach with tradition was made at the moving and seconding of the Address. Many years previously Charles Fenwick, a miner associated with the Liberal party, departed from the convention by which Court dress or uniform was worn at the opening ceremony, and in 1928 a Conservative, Jephcott, who had been a working engineer, wore ordinary clothes for the occasion. Now, in 1929, for the first time, everyday attire was worn by both the mover and the seconder.

A well-known statesman said to me: "It is only by a Coalition, although without a Coalition Government, that Parliament, as at present constituted, can go on for a long time." MacDonald himself was conscious of the precarious position. With a view to the co-operation of all parties he suggested that the House should regard itself as a Council of State. As far back as 1914 he deplored the excessive partisanship which, he thought, was threatening representative institutions. Now he dissented from the doctrine that it was the duty of the Opposition to oppose; that, he held, was a crime against the State; the right of the Opposition was to discuss fully all measures proposed.

The Prime Minister's personal relations with the Conservative leader facilitated as they did in his first Government, the transaction of business. Again he was less cordial to the small party which held the balance. It was annoying to MacDonald to think that the Liberals could turn him out. They wanted their price in the Electoral Reform which would give them seats more nearly in proportion to the votes that they received in the country.

"Hustling diplomacy" was, in the opinion of the old-fashioned, incongruous. It was adopted when MacDonald, soon after his appointment, met at Forres General Dawes, the new American Ambassador who came straight North on arriving from Washington, and discussed with him on the Findhorn the limitation of naval armaments. The Ambassador was the bearer of important suggestions from the President of the United States for an Agreement. MacDonald, in turn, crossed the Atlantic—the first Prime Minister to visit the President—and had wide-ranging, informal talks with Hoover.

World-wide notoriety and warm approval at home were obtained by Snowden through his persistent, firm stand for British interests at The Hague Conference on Reparations. He fought tenaciously against a distribution of the Annuities by which France and Italy would gain at our expense. Foreign critics accused him of carrying into the international assembly his brusque Parliamentary manner.

"Monsieur Non, Non" he was dubbed in the Paris Press on his repeated rejection of compromise. A deadlock appeared to have been reached until at last one midnight agreement took place on acceptable terms. A conciliatory influence on the Conference was exercised by Henderson, who was in charge of the Political Committee and with the view to European appeasement was concerned in the evacuation of German territory by Allied forces. To the terms decided on by the creditor powers Germany agreed, and the Rhineland was evacuated six years ahead of the time stipulated in the Versailles Treaty.

Snowden on his return from The Hague had a foretaste of the national popularity which he enjoyed in the 1931 financial crisis. He was greeted with enthusiasm by a vast crowd at Liverpool Street station. A message of congratulation from the King awaited him at Downing Street. He was a guest at Sandringham; and the Freedom of the City of London was conferred on the Socialist whom it had distrusted.

Henderson was a capable Foreign Secretary, with a clear vision of what he wanted and patience in pursuit of it. Besides his activities at Geneva, where he made an excellent impression, he framed, after long negotiation, the draft Treaty with Egypt, and although it was not then carried out it laid down the lines of the Treaty of Alliance on which agreement was reached in 1937. Lord Lloyd, the High Commissioner, resigned at an interview with Henderson, on account of differences on policy. Conservatives made a fuss about it, but their attack on the Foreign Secretary was weakened by the discovery that there had been repeated differences between Lord Lloyd and Austen Chamberlain. Henderson was against interference in the internal administration of Egypt and established friendly relations with its rulers. He got his way in the case of the Soviet. Active trade relations with Russia were resumed and Ambassadors were appointed.

A step of immense significance in Imperial development was taken by the statement of the Viceroy, Lord Irwin (Viscount Halifax), on behalf of the Government, that it was implicit in the 1917 Montagu declaration that the natural issue of India's constitutional progress was her attainment of Dominion status. Diehards were shocked by the statement, and critics complained of its being made while the Simon Commission of Inquiry was still at work. But the spirit that inspired it was shared by all party leaders and led to the Conference representing various interests in India.

Sufferance was in domestic affairs the badge of the Government. It had to try to humour the Liberals and it had to submit to repeated rebuffs by the House of Lords. Several of its measures were either rejected or emasculated by the Peers, and the Trade Disputes Bill had its "throat cut" in the House of Commons by the Liberals.

From his own party MacDonald suffered annoyance. While he himself was inclining to the Right, as his retirement from the I.L.P. indicated, colleagues discontented with his cautious leadership, threw up office. Sir Charles Trevelyan (son of Sir George Trevelyan, the distinguished author and statesman), resigned when his Education plans were frustrated. His proposal to raise the school-leaving age came up against the problem of the Church schools, and the Bill was killed by a Catholic amendment moved from the Labour benches. On resigning, Trevelyan denounced the Government for falling short in its Socialism.

Sir Oswald Mosley, who had been a Conservative and an Independent before joining the Labour party, also resigned office under MacDonald because of dissatisfaction with the Government policy. His wife, Lady Cynthia, Lord Curzon's daughter, was equally disillusioned. Many Parliamentarians thought that Mosley might become leader of the Labour Party. He had a striking personality and was a brilliant speaker. But he was autocratic.

"He talks to us," a Labour member said, "like a landlord addressing his tenantry." When he could not get his own way he tried, like disappointed politicians in other generations, to found a new party. He crossed to the Opposition side with a few followers in a party which was to challenge the whole political system, but he obtained no foothold in Parliament.

I was not surprised that MacDonald, with his sense of decorum, felt ashamed of unruly extremists. The House was never so shocked since Bradlaugh administered the Oath to himself, as when John Beckett, a Socialist, seized the Mace. Beckett was a teller in a division and on the announcement of the figures he lifted the historic emblem from the table and carried it to the Bar. There the attendants took it from his arms. Orderly Labour members glared at the offender.

The Party was again rightly indignant when Sandham, another Left Winger, in a speech to an I.L.P. Council meeting, accused Labour members of accepting bribes to help to pass Bills in private interests and also of getting drunk in the House. The charge of drunkenness required no formal refutation. When the charge of bribery was referred to the Committee of Privileges Sandham declined to give any particulars. The Committee sentenced him to the censure of the House, and on the Government motion he was admonished by the Speaker.

This was an extremely rare process. The most memorable occasion was in 1892 when three railway directors were admonished by Mr. Speaker Peel. In 1897 a moneylender, for refusing to answer questions by a Select Committee, was, standing at the Bar, admonished. On the present occasion, while Sandham stood in his place, Mr. Speaker Fitzroy, seated, with three-cornered hat on top of wig, delivered the admonition in few words with grave, impressive dignity. It was, as he said, a painful duty.

I was reminded by a disorderly scene in 1931 of the occasion when refractory Irish Nationalists were carried out by police. Fortunately on the present occasion it was not necessary to call them in. The scene was distressing enough. A Socialist on being suspended refused to leave the House. The messengers who were directed to remove him were obstructed by his Left Wing colleagues. A struggle lasting

several minutes occurred before he could be extracted from a back bench, the sitting of the House being meanwhile suspended. Subsequently the offenders offered an adequate apology.

MacDonald lost an intimate personal friend by the death of Lord Thomson, the Secretary of State for Air, in the terrible disaster to R.101 near Beauvais. R.101 was making the first attempt of an airship to fly to India. Lord Thomson's death in the adventure reminded me of the fate of Huskisson who was knocked down by the locomotive and killed at the opening of the first railway between Liverpool and Manchester. Lord Thomson was a modest, charming man, with fine intelligence and tact.

I asked a friend in the Cabinet after the Air Minister's death who were MacDonald's confidential colleagues. Was Snowden or Henderson among them? "His only confidant," my friend replied in a censorious tone, "is Jim Thomas."

An excellent impression as member and Minister was made by Herbert Morrison. The House liked the quick-witted, keen, pleasant-faced cockney, with a wisp of hair falling on the forehead. As Minister of Transport Morrison had a congenial office. He had the mind of the municipal administrator—as used to be said of Joseph Chamberlain—but he was superior to some older official colleagues in Parliamentary talent. His London Transport Bill was a great achievement.

"Willie" Graham, one of the most industrious men on the Treasury bench, excited the amazement and won the love of the House, which mourned his death a few years later. He was an amiable, clever, little Scot, versed in economics. The House wondered that one small head could carry all he knew. He could speak breathlessly for an hour, setting off argument by a mass of statistics, without the aid of a note. Ingenuity was displayed by him in steering the Coal Mines Bill through the shoals of Liberal and Conservative criticism.

While new men were coming forward, famous veterans passed away. Lord Rosebery died in 1929; Lord Balfour and Lord Birkenhead died in 1930. I had the good fortune to sit near Lord Balfour at the dinner of the Club of Scottish journalists in London a few years before his death. He looked very well, although his deafness made it necessary for him to get words repeated to him. For his speech he prepared a few notes on the back of the menu card in the same way as he made notes on an envelope in Parliament.

A reference to golf by Roberts of the *Scotsman*, in proposing his health, drew from Lord Balfour some characteristic observations. He recommended to the philosopher a study of the question how a game played for centuries in one country came to be adopted in another, and in his light-hearted way the statesman full of honour and fame professed that if he were ever remembered in the future it would be because of his own service in bringing the game across the Border! He had been asked recently at dinner by a lady: "Have you never thought of taking up golf!"

I celebrated my Gallery Jubilee in January, 1931. What a change in the scene since I began work in Parliament half-a-century ago! The Irish Nationalists have gone. The Labour party is for the second time in office. There are women in the House. One is a Cabinet Minister. I look across at the Strangers' Gallery and see as many women as men where formerly only men were admitted. On the benches

where in my early years every member wore his silk hat less than half-a-dozen maintain that tradition; and the lounge jacket has displaced the frock coat. The House is no longer absorbed in constitutional questions. It is occupied with financial and economic problems, with trade and industry, with bread-and-butter politics, with social services. The day of dialectics has gone; discussion is intensely practical.

Talking with Lloyd George of dramatic incidents in my half century at Westminster, I recalled Goschen's refusal to give a "blank cheque" to Salisbury. "And that is what *I* will not do," said Lloyd George. To whom, I asked, would *he* not give a blank cheque. "Baldwin," he answered with a baffling smile. Meantime he was giving qualified support to MacDonald.

A dual difficulty confronted "L.G.": it was to make the Labour Government worthy of support and to hold his own party together in a common policy. Occasionally he poured derision on the Ministers. He complained of a lack of vitamins in their programme; he called them "toddlers taken out by their Departmental nurses." But he gave them chance after chance in the hope of getting from them Electoral Reform. That was held up by differences between the three parties and the two Houses while the country drifted into the financial storm which swamped all programmes.

The Liberals, someone said, were united by a common distrust of their leader. That was not true. They had not a common distrust of their leader and they were not united. Lloyd George's leadership was renounced by Grey and the colleagues who, in the words of one of them, declined to "fetch and carry" for ungrateful Socialists. Runciman, Simon, Ernest Brown and Hore-Belisha took the independent course which opened their way to office in the National Government. Successive Chief Whips failed to restore unity in the party.

Sir John Simon, more than anyone else, provoked Lloyd George's wrath by his attitude. He was pointed and forcible in criticism of Socialist policy and scornful in his laments at the desertion of Liberal principle on land taxes by Lloyd George and other Liberal friends. He dared to jeer at the peroration of a speech by Lloyd George, describing it as a preposterous mixture of bad law and the Book of Revelation. In a letter to Sir Archibald Sinclair, the Chief Whip of the party, Sir John formally dissociated himself from the Liberal leader's tactics, and charged him with an attempt to make out that his abandonment of a proclaimed principle was a triumph of disinterested statesmanship.

Since Gladstone's castigation of Joseph Chamberlain I never heard a castigation so severe as Lloyd George inflicted on Sir John Simon, who was then seated at his side. "L.G." took the opportunity to express feelings which he had held for many years. It was a brilliant philippic with irony, humour and invective.

The House shook with laughter when he likened Simon politically to a life-long teetotaler, who took suddenly to drink on his approach to the seventh decade of his life, reeling from one side to the other. With appropriate motions of the arms he pictured Sir John swaying between different parts of the House, and finally ending his career by entering "an inebriates' home," whereat "L.G." pointed dramatically to the Conservative benches.

I doubt if Sir John was disturbed by this parting admonition. That he had warm feelings those who knew him personally testify, but to the world he appeared a cold man. He showed political courage by the resignation of high office on the question

of conscription early in his career and always he went his own way. At no time was he rattled. In Parliament as a rule he maintained the passionless give-and-take of the Bar. During debate in which he was concerned he would sit calmly, with head bent slightly to the side, twirling his thumbs, and looking as patient and tolerant of human weakness as he might have looked when giving the legal advice which was so highly valued. His intellectual power was universally recognised and his speeches displayed his scholarship and knowledge of literature. It was said that he had no friends. Perhaps few men understood him, but I have no doubt that he had all the friends whose friendship he appreciated.

Even the Conservatives, with their traditional discipline, broke out in revolts. Empire Crusaders and other extreme, impatient Protectionists agitated against Baldwin, because of his refusal to commit himself definitely to food taxation. They were persistent in their challenge to his leadership, and although a ballot of Peers, members of the House of Commons and candidates of the party, resulted in the defeat of a motion for his deposition, the minority was so considerable that his critics thought he would resign. But he held his ground.

"I have no thought of resigning," he said to a Liberal friend, Sir Donald Maclean, in the Lobby. He displayed his authority as leader on another highly important question, which was dividing the party, the India question.

Churchill ceased to attend the Conservative "Shadow Cabinet" because of its Indian reform policy. He persisted in his disagreement with Front Bench colleagues on that subject, and a section of Conservative back-benchers shared his fears of the sudden introduction of Dominion status with the Federal system. But the policy which was to be embodied in the India Bill had a powerful advocate in Baldwin.

I was impressed by the speeches in which the Conservative leader educated his party and on various issues gave it a Progressive direction. He liked to describe himself as a Tory, rather than as a Conservative. He was a Disraelian Tory, not a Cecil Conservative.

A speech that he delivered on Indian policy was a milestone in his party's progress. It would be the duty of Conservatives, Baldwin told them, if returned to power, to implement the work of the Round Table Conference. Some of his followers were shocked by the Viceroy's conversations with Gandhi, but their leader eulogised Lord Irwin as one of the greatest Viceroys and declared that the ultimate settlement would depend not on force but on good will, sympathy and understanding.

Baldwin, on the floor of the House, challenged his party on his leadership. If they wanted to approach the Indian settlement in a niggling spirit, "in God's name let them choose a man to lead them." By his defiance of the die-hards of all sections he fortified his position.

The colleague destined to wear his mantle came, in 1931, conspicuously to the front. As Churchill had cut himself off from former colleagues, Neville Chamberlain was called on by Baldwin to speak for the party even on Finance. Thus it fell to Neville to represent the Conservatives in the financial crisis.

## CHAPTER XX

### THE 1931 CRISIS

*Gathering Clouds—The May Report—Labour Party and MacDonald—National Government—My 14th General Election—A Lop-sided Parliament—The “Elder Statesman”—The Distinguished Outsider—Rift Over Tariffs—A Strange Cabinet Device—Irreparable Breach—The Prime Minister’s Son—Party Nicknames—MacDonald’s Eyesight—World Economic Conference—Viscount Snowden Attacks MacDonald—India Bill—The Calm Pilot.*

THE FIRST PREMONITION OF THE CRISIS OF 1931 THAT I RECEIVED CAME FROM MACDONALD. When the difficulties that had arisen between the Liberals and Snowden on the land value tax, which was the outstanding feature of the Budget, were settled and immediate danger to the Government was averted, I ventured to say to the Prime Minister that he would be able now to go on. “I don’t know about that,” replied MacDonald, “a new depression is coming from another quarter.”

The financial clouds which he foresaw appeared on the horizon, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer warned the House of Commons that drastic and disagreeable measures would be required to maintain Budget equilibrium. A violent shock was given to the House by the report of the Economy Committee presided over by Sir George May.

I remember how members snatched copies of the report from the Vote Office in the Lobby. It was issued when they were setting out for their summer holiday. They were staggered by a glance at the figures. To produce a properly balanced Budget in 1932 a deficiency of 120 millions would have to be made good by economies and new taxation; an immediate saving of 96½ millions was required.

Dramatic events at Downing Street followed these disclosures. A Cabinet Committee to consider the situation arranged to meet on August 25, but a communication from Snowden hurried MacDonald back from Scotland a fortnight earlier; he found that the bankers were alarmed by the withdrawals by foreign depositors and the danger to our gold reserves. A blow was given to confidence in British stability.

“We are determined that the Budget shall be balanced,” the Prime Minister and the Chancellor informed the Lobby journalists, assembled in the Cabinet room at No. 10. That was the unanimous intention of the Cabinet Committee. But how was it to be carried out? Conservative and Liberal leaders were called into consultation. Neville Chamberlain was the principal Conservative representative, and as Lloyd George was laid up his party was represented chiefly by Sir Herbert Samuel.

The idea of a National Government had sprang up in fertile minds during the session, and had luxurious growth in Lobby conjecture. A new alignment of parties had been suggested by free-thinking politicians in order to bring together those sections, whether Liberal, Labour or Conservative, who had common aims.

It was at first a timid suggestion. Now, in spite of the prejudice against Coalition, there was a growing admission of the necessity for a Parliamentary arrangement to deal with the emergency.

I spent many exciting hours in Downing Street while the Cabinet was considering the scheme for balancing the Budget, put before it by the Prime Minister and the Chancellor. Its meetings on one critical day began at eleven in the morning and ended at ten-thirty at night.

My holiday was overdue, and I had booked a room in the Highlands. I happened to meet a Minister, whom I knew very well, on his way from No. 10 to lunch, and asked him if it would be prudent for a political correspondent to leave London. His answer, though discreet, was sufficient.

I was glad that I remained. The crisis blazed up in Downing Street. Repeated meetings of the Cabinet failed to secure agreement on the economies which MacDonald and Snowden, as well as the Conservative and Liberal consultants, considered necessary. Trade Union leaders and dissentient Ministers were opposed particularly to the recommended cut in the unemployment dole.

Deadlock and an exciting week-end! The King returned on Sunday from Balmoral where he had just gone; he saw the Prime Minister, and on MacDonald's advice received Baldwin (back from Aix) and Samuel. About midnight I heard that MacDonald was again at the Palace. It has been said that when he left Downing Street he did not know in what capacity he would return. His colleagues did not know. Their resignations were in his hands.

When I hurried to Fleet Street from Downing Street that Sunday night I had no doubt that a Government representing all parties was to be formed. But by whom? Neville Chamberlain and Labour Ministers when they went to bed expected to hear in the morning that Baldwin was Prime Minister. Journalists who sat up late were not so surprised on the morrow when MacDonald was reappointed. Accepting once more the King's commission, he formed a National Government with the co-operation of Baldwin and Samuel.

Baldwin had often said, after his early experience, that he would never again join a Coalition. What he now assisted to promote, he explained, was not a Coalition Government but the co-operation of individuals for a specific purpose.

Never since Peel adopted Free Trade, not even at the Home Rule split of the Liberals, had so great a proportion of a party left its leader as now left MacDonald. When taunted with desertion, former Labour colleagues retorted that the captain brought in pirates and scuttled the ship. Among the Socialist minority who stood by MacDonald and Snowden were Lord Sankey, the Lord Chancellor, and J. H. Thomas.

An extraordinary transformation was seen in the House of Commons when Baldwin took his seat on the Treasury Bench at MacDonald's right hand. Conservatives and Liberals came over to the Government side and beside them sat the group of Socialists who continued to act with MacDonald and formed the "National Labour Party." The majority of Labour members crossed to the Opposition side, with Henderson as their experienced leader.

MacDonald was jeered at by former followers when he explained the reasons for the formation of the National Government. On the other hand, when Snowden submitted the emergency Budget, Conservatives and Liberals rose and cheered the

Socialist Chancellor. The members of the Labour Cabinet who had gone into • Opposition were embarrassed by revelation of the extent to which they were prepared in office to assent to "cuts" which they now condemned.

"They can run away from their public duty; they cannot run away from their own selves," Sir Herbert Samuel said in reference to their record. Still more biting was the taunt thrown at them by the man in whom they had placed special confidence. Looking across the table at old colleagues, Snowden predicted in his most provocative tone that "only a few weeks possibly remain before the place that knows them now will know them no more." That was a true prediction.

Talk of a General Election revealed differences on the Government side. Conservatives wanted it; the majority of Liberals were at first strongly opposed to it; the Prime Minister hesitated and enjoined silence on the subject. Meantime, the suspension of the Gold Standard impressed the country with the gravity of the economic situation. It was contended in quarters favourable to a permanent Coalition that a mandate should be obtained for the adjustment of the trade balance, but the question of Tariffs was troublesome and increased the difficulty of an Election formula.

A new political crisis seemed about to shatter the new Government. The danger was averted. Although Lloyd George from his sick room continued to object to an immediate election, Sir Herbert Samuel, after a series of Cabinet meetings and consultations with Liberal colleagues, assented to it.

One midnight, early in October, after we, journalists, had waited for hours we learned in the Lobby that the Cabinet had come to an agreement. Later we heard that there was to be an election on the basis of a manifesto by the Prime Minister, the other party leaders issuing their own addresses. Lloyd George denounced the election as a most wanton Tory manœuvre to secure a party advantage.

This was the fourteenth General Election since I entered the Press Gallery. It gave to the Prime Minister, who had been so unpopular during the first Great War, an unparalleled majority, with a "doctor's mandate" to prescribe financial and economic treatment, according to his discretion, for the national patient. The cry "your savings in danger" increased the patient's anxiety and hurried him to the booth to vote for MacDonald.

I believe it would have been better if the new House had not been so lop-sided—better for the Parliamentary system, better for the Government, better for the Prime Minister himself. He wished sometimes that the Conservatives had not been in overwhelming force.

Three benches were more than ample for the survivors of the Labour Party. All the anti-MacDonald members of the Socialist Cabinet were defeated, except Lansbury, who became the leader of the Opposition. A new Fourth Party, a small I.L.P. group, led by James Maxton who looked the Revolutionary but whose personal charm endeared him to every class, established itself on the front bench below the Opposition gangway where the famous Fourth Party sat fifty years earlier.

Liberals formed the second largest party but were divided. Over a score, led by Sir John Simon with Runciman at least equal to him in influence, constituted the Liberal National party, which was ready to support the Prime Minister in any measure, including tariffs. Followers of Sir Herbert Samuel, with the Liberal official

organisation behind them, clung tenaciously to Free Trade. Samuel was elected Chairman of the party. Lloyd George did not desire the position. He had his own family party of independent Liberals.

I looked down on an unusually large proportion of unknown faces. Many men had been elected in the national upheaval without political training or inclination. Some of them told me that they did not expect to succeed when they stood as candidates. They could not afford to give up their business or profession. Fortunately for them the Government majority was so excessive that leave of absence might be got easily from the Whip.

Baldwin, Lord President of the Council, lived at No. 11, Downing Street, so that he might confer with the Prime Minister at any time. They divided the Government between them in one position or another for the next six years. Conservatives who were disappointed with their leader and Socialists who were disappointed with MacDonald used to say that Baldwin was the Socialist and MacDonald the Conservative. When the Prime Minister was away at international conferences and on many other occasions Baldwin acted as leader of the House of Commons. In that capacity he excelled MacDonald whose strength lay in Cabinet management. Colleagues testified that the Prime Minister was tactful and patient in presiding over their deliberations.

Neville Chamberlain succeeded Snowden, who did not desire an administrative post, as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Sir John Simon became Foreign Secretary, and Runciman occupied a key position as President of the Board of Trade.

Snowden went to the House of Lords (as Lord Privy Seal) in order to keep a place for himself in political life. When asked by one of the Peers, after being for a little time in his new environment, how he liked their House, he naïvely replied: "I like your hours."

Sir Austen Chamberlain was First Lord of the Admiralty in the emergency Government but in the Government reconstructed after the election he made way for younger men. For the remainder of his life Austen occupied the corner below the gangway on the Government side of the House where his father sat at various periods. He played the rôle of Elder Statesman and exercised greater influence than for many years previously. He was the only man who could have brought the Government down. All parties listened with sincere respect to the veteran who in his new freedom spoke with new vigour.

In Sir Austen we saw the ideal Parliamentarian of a generation that was fast passing away. He was fastidious in his get-up, with frock coat, and the inevitable monocle. By the wearing of the silk hat, and by raising it whenever he was mentioned, whether in praise or criticism, he maintained old tradition. Not only was he ceremonious in habit but he also gave a lesson in studied courtesy to the new generation.

Churchill was not invited to join the Government. With mock solemnity he avowed for it discriminating benevolence. This left him at liberty, from the head of the front bench below the Ministerial gangway, to fire freely at the Government and to flout its leaders.

In his gravest mood he criticised the Statute of Westminster, which removed restrictions on the legislative autonomy of the Dominions; he dwelt on the danger of Dominion status for India and also its danger in the Irish Free State.

Tariffs formed exciting chapters in the history of the Cabinet. At first a safe approach was made to the dangerous subject. There was no difficulty over the power given to the Board of Trade to impose emergency duties on abnormal imports of manufactures.

Runciman, in his first speech from the Treasury Bench since he left it with Asquith in 1916, submitted the scheme. Back in his old office he exhibited again the business capacity which Unionist colleagues in the first Coalition appreciated. He also delighted the thorough-going supporters of the Government by his trenchant speeches. As administrator and debater he maintained his high prestige.

I was not surprised when the rift in the Cabinet occurred over permanent tariffs. The large majority of the Ministers approved of a duty of 10 per cent on imports. It was resisted by the out-and-out Free Traders in the Cabinet—Lord Snowden and the Liberals, Sir Herbert Samuel, Sir Donald Maclean and Sir Archibald Sinclair.

There is the authority of a Minister for saying that if the four had left the Government at this stage of its career, MacDonald would have resigned. I heard a rumour that if he had done so, his successor would have been Runciman.

The agreement-to-differ, by which the dissenting Free Traders got liberty to speak and vote against Cabinet policy, excited the surprise of all parties and a great deal of jeering. MacDonald in talk with me denied that the rule for the Cabinet to speak with one voice had a constitutional origin; it was designed, as he said, for party purposes. But whatever may have happened before collective Ministerial responsibility was established, all members of the Cabinet in modern times were required, as Melbourne enjoined on his colleagues on a historic occasion, to be "in the same story."

Who suggested the strange new device? Apparently the suggestion did not come from the Free Traders. One of them stated that on hearing it they withdrew from the Cabinet room for consultation.

The Government was put to shame by the operation of its life-saving device. The spectacle of the Home Secretary, Sir Herbert Samuel, rising from the Treasury bench and denouncing the Cabinet policy provided good "copy" for the Press Gallery but shocked members brought up in the strict constitutional school. Sir Herbert made his attack with more than his customary animation and was answered by official colleagues with unusual asperity.

By the death of Sir Donald Maclean the Free Traders lost a tactful, straightforward, high-minded colleague. Along with sensitive consideration for other men's feelings was the courage that he displayed after the Coupon Election in the leadership of the "Wee Frees."

Personal character counts in politics. That was shown by the esteem in which Donald Maclean was held. He had, as Baldwin testified, a soul as clean as the west wind that blew over his ancestral island, Tiree. J. M. Barrie was one of his great friends and went with him occasionally to the House of Commons. I saw Sir Donald late one evening escorting J. M. B. to the Special Gallery.

An unbridgable breach in the Cabinet was caused by the Ottawa Agreements. Free Traders offered uncompromising opposition to the import duties, inherent in the system of preferences for Empire goods and produce, which was so gratifying to the sons of Joseph Chamberlain. Agreement to differ was impossible; in spite of the Prime Minister's harmonizing influence Samuel, Sinclair and Snowden resigned.

I was reminded by their departure of the secessions from the Balfour Government on the fiscal issue. Balfour, deprived of able colleagues, formed a "scratch crew." MacDonald was fortunate in having at his command able men of three parties. He did not think it necessary to resign. I suppose he now felt more at ease in his surroundings than at the previous crisis.

The Prime Minister's son, Malcolm, got his first big opportunity, as Under Secretary for the Dominions, in winding up a debate on the Ottawa Agreements. His effort was a thorough success. Already Malcolm MacDonald had won the favour of the House by his modesty and fairness; now he shone on a critical occasion. At the close of his speech members of all parties shook hands with the young man. I sent a letter of congratulation to his father, who passed it on to Malcolm.

Samuelites observed with some spleen how the Simon group of Liberals profited by their own resignations. Two efficient Junior Ministers, Ernest Brown and Hore-Belisha, were promoted, and Sir Godfrey Collins, to his own surprise, was taken from a back bench into the Cabinet.

Many years previously I received a message from Sir Godfrey asking if I would meet him in the Lobby for a chat. He had been offered a Whipship but did not care for the job and he wished to know if I thought it would hinder his appointment to a Departmental office. I advised him to take what was offered. Subsequently he became Liberal Whip and now he was able to apply his administrative capacity to the office, which Sir Archibald Sinclair had vacated, of Secretary of State for Scotland.

Nicknames were given to the rival Liberal groups. Sir Stafford Cripps described the Samuel group as Leavites and the Simon group as Sit-tights. Lloyd George characterised the Simonites as Sadducees, the Samuelites as Pharisees. He scorned the latter for staying so long in the Government.

The wanderings and hesitations of the Liberal Free Traders were not yet ended. For a year they sat below the Ministerial gangway, supporting the Government in its general policy, apart from tariffs. But differences with the Government arose on various questions. At the opening of the 1933-34 session they crossed to the Opposition side.

These events may not now appear so exciting as they were at the time. But they were significant on account of the division that they made, and which lasted as long as Peace lasted, in the Liberal Party.

Meanwhile overwhelming majorities were easily secured by the National Government. Although there were occasional discords in the ranks the adroit Chief Whip, Capt. Margesson, who served four Prime Ministers, had not to endure the difficulties which confronted his predecessors.

In my diary are notes on many of the subjects which occupied the attention of the Government and Parliament in the last decade of Peace. Here I may mention the dispute with de Valera: the recurring problem of the American Debt: the imprisonment and trial in Moscow of British engineers charged with sabotage. Efforts, considered halting by Labour and other critics, were made by the Government to put an end to slums and overcrowding. Unemployment was year after year a baffling problem, and the specially distressed areas were a running sore which required exceptional treatment.

The brilliantly successful War Loan conversion scheme was a feather in the cap of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. As a rule Neville Chamberlain's finance was called "unimaginative." His Budgets, based on "Safety First," passed from

"Bleak House" to "Great Expectations," and though his aspirations were not fully realized he revived confidence at home and abroad in the economic structure, reduced taxation and eventually restored the 1931 cuts on unemployment benefit and pay of public servants.

Runciman was applauded by the Government's supporters for a series of commercial treaties with foreign countries. See, they said, what we can do when with our new tariff policy we have the power of effective bargaining!

The Prime Minister, with Simon at hand as Foreign Secretary, played his part in international affairs. One of his successes was in the attaining of the Lausanne Agreement which, it was vainly hoped, would provide a lasting settlement of the question of German Reparations. This success was due, in large measure, to MacDonald's perseverance and tact in mediation. Critics complained later that Great Britain was left with its debt, but for the moment the agreement caused widespread relief, and the Prime Minister on his return had a triumphant reception, at the railway station, from colleagues and other friends.

Trouble in MacDonald's eyes was revealed in 1932. His sight was impaired by his ultra-conscientious habit of personally reading masses of documents.

An operation was performed first on the left eye and a few months later on the right. On both occasions he was visited in hospital by the King.

A ray of hope for suffering nations was seen in the Monetary and Economic Conference of 1933, which MacDonald suggested. This was the largest international assembly ever held—in London at any rate. Statesmen, economists and journalists came from all parts of the world. Among the statesmen Dollfuss, the plucky little Chancellor of Austria, was a popular figure. There was a babel of tongues in the corridors and writing rooms of the Geological Museum in South Kensington and a bewildering supply of papers and reports of discussions.

Responsibility for the failure of the Conference, with its elaborate organisation to achieve the hoped-for results was laid on the President of the United States. MacDonald had gone to Washington on the invitation of Roosevelt and exchanged views with him on the world situation. They had a common purpose; but the Conference was brought to a deadlock by Roosevelt's declaration against a temporary stabilisation of currency. Although the delegates of the gold standard countries declined to take part in discussion on monetary questions progress was made in other directions, and the adjournment of the Conference was described by MacDonald as "a recess and not a finish." But a finish it proved to be.

This was for the Prime Minister a severe disappointment, and gall was poured into the sore by critics. Snowden, who had retired from office with the other Free Traders, was specially bitter.

The smile and gleam of humour on Snowden's face dispelled the notion that his life was a habitual snarl. It was a pleasure for me at an earlier period to preside at the Press Gallery dinner at which he was the guest of honour. In order that he might keep that engagement King George graciously excused him from obeying a command to the Palace. His devoted wife had not a similar excuse but spent a few minutes with us before going on to dine with their Majesties. On that occasion I found Snowden had a tender, sympathetic side to his nature.

But "vitriolic" was the standard definition of Snowden's aggressive style in public controversy. It was true of his strictures on MacDonald in debate on the Economic Conference. He gave vent to his feelings about the leader from whom he was now alienated by the tariff issue, by declaring that it was a positive danger to the country to have its affairs in the hands of a man who every time he spoke exposed his ignorance or incapacity.

The repeal of Snowden's Land Value Tax touched him at a sensitive point. Not content with its suspension, Conservatives demanded its removal from the Statute Book. Out of consideration for Snowden's services in the financial crisis, Baldwin resisted their demand for two or three years. But at last the tax was repealed. "Resurgam" was Asquith's epitaph for Lloyd George's Land Value Duties when they were buried by their author's Coalition Government, but the most optimistic Socialist could not look forward to Snowden's tax rising from the grave.

Snowden was deliberately galling in his comments on his former leader. He said openly what other harsh critics, Liberal and Labour, were saying in the Lobby, when he suggested that there was no humiliation to which MacDonald would not submit if the Cabinet would only allow him to be Prime Minister.

There were still some matters on which the Conservatives did not get their own way. A group in both Houses persisted in agitating for House of Lords "Reform" and Legislation for the purpose was tried again by the Peers. As the life of the 1931 Parliament drew nearer to its natural end, they became more and more eager to set up a bulwark against dreaded Socialism. But the Government by a wary, non-committal attitude dashed the hopes of the impatient Die-hards.

Acrimonious debates and lively personal encounters on the Ministerial side arose out of Indian Constitutional Reform. Conservative opponents of the scheme made repeated attempts at party meetings and in Parliament to prevent its adoption. Bitter reproaches were thrown by them at their party leader, but they did not deflect Baldwin from the course which he believed necessary in order to save India to the Empire. He pointed out to those who taunted him with not having the old Conservative temperament that we were living in the twentieth century, and he warned them against repeating in India our Irish experience. "I am not going," he declared, "to miss the 'bus every time."

Churchill, the principal critic of the Indian policy so staunchly upheld by Baldwin, splashed diatribes over the Ministers from whom he was separated only by the gangway. George Lansbury accused him of audacity and effrontery in bullying the Government. From that censor he resented rebuke; he jeered at the "perfect cataract of semi-incoherent insults from the so-called leader of the so-called Opposition."

I had followed the debates on Gladstone's Irish Land Bill, on the Home Rule Bills and on the Lloyd George projects, but, prodigious though those were, none contained such a mass of material as the India Bill in providing for the Federation of all India, with provincial autonomy and responsible Government at the centre.

Sir Samuel Hoare acquired a first-rate Parliamentary reputation by the piloting of this complex measure. His knowledge of its details was equalled by his skill and patience in defending it. He had answered thousands of questions by the Joint Select Committee on whose recommendations the Bill was framed. I don't know

how many speeches he delivered in the House in reply to the Conservatives who thought that it went a dangerous length, and to the Opposition members who thought it did not assure India of sufficient self-government.

I marvelled at his placidity under attack. Even Churchill's gibes did not goad "Sam" Hoare into a display of temper. A gentle tap on the box was his only form of forceful expression.

## CHAPTER XXI

### WAR SHADOWS

*Disarmament—Peripatetic Ministers—Churchill on Air Menace—Our Frontier on the Rhine—Germany Arms—“J.R.M.” on Imperial Defence—Hitler’s Defiance—Austen Chamberlain’s Warning.*

MY DIARY SHOWS HOW THE ATTENTION OF PARLIAMENT WAS DRAWN WITH DEEPENING concern to the restless ambitions of dissatisfied Powers. I do not attempt a chronicle of events which have been recorded by many able hands. It is with the Parliamentary reactions that I deal.

An uneasy sense of world insecurity crept into the House of Commons in the early 'nineteen-thirties, when MacDonald depicted an ominous background, full of shadows and uncertainties. The House was shocked by Japan's seizure of Manchuria—an unpunished act of aggression which set an evil example; and while vigilant eyes saw a dark cloud in Italy's designs on Abyssinia, anxiety about peace in Europe grew after the Nazis captured control in Germany and Hitler became Chancellor of the Reich.

Many of the Government's supporters were all along sceptical of international disarmament, but large sections of the House applauded the Prime Minister's efforts to secure it, and zealous official colleagues co-operated with him. Ministers visited foreign Statesmen, Anthony Eden hurrying from one capital to another in the hope of winning agreement, while Arthur Henderson, the President of the Disarmament Conference, although ill and often in great pain, indefatigably used his influence with that object. I found that some members laid the blame partly on France for the disagreement of the Powers; others appreciated more fully her preoccupation with security while Germany was rearming.

Members who demanded a bold British policy disliked frequent Ministerial tours abroad. For instance, when MacDonald accompanied by Sir John Simon, went to Italy and talked with Mussolini the Opposition taunted him with the rôle of a suppliant, and Churchill shared doubts of the value of the Four Power Pact, brought home by "our modern Don Quixote with Sancho Panza at his tail."

Churchill, as soon as ominous clouds appeared on the horizon, called attention to German rearmament and pointed a warning finger specially to the Air menace. It was difficult to pierce the minds of men who did not wish to be disturbed. On the Air menace occasional reflections were made by Baldwin, who as the leader of the largest party was held by Churchill specially responsible. By one of his observations he exposed himself and his generation to upbraiding.

When he said the question of aerial warfare was one for the young men far more than for the older I heard young men in his own party asking in the Lobby what the older had been doing when they allowed the country to become insecure.

Some satisfaction was given by Baldwin's assurance in 1934, in reply to Churchill, that if our efforts to secure disarmament failed—as they did fail—the Government would see to it that in Air strength and power we should no longer be inferior to any country "within striking distance of our shores." That phrase was used as long ago as 1924, when Labour was in office, in a resolution moved by Sir Samuel Hoare. The Conservative leader was not allowed to forget his own use of it at a more critical time.

Historic phrases dropped, casually as it were, from Baldwin's lips. He stood at the table with a jumble of notes on the box. They seemed to be a collection of odds and ends prepared by a secretary. But now and again in his chatty way Baldwin put into pictorial words a significant thought.

The declaration that now "our frontier lies on the Rhine" thrilled the House like the same orator's prayer in the industrial crisis "Peace in our time, O Lord." Did it mean, the Lobby asked, a challenge to Germany? Did it mean a military arrangement with France and an Air basis there?

Loathing of Nazi-ism, intensified by the persecution of the Jews, was expressed in stern language by Sir Austen Chamberlain. The Elder Statesman was cheered in every quarter when he stigmatised the new spirit of German nationalism as the embodiment of the worst of All-Prussia Imperialism, with added savagery and racial pride. In the new Germany, as he sadly observed, Locarno was a term of abuse. Repeatedly he addressed to that country dignified, emphatic warnings against aggression.

Parliament was startled and shocked by the murder of Dollfuss, the Austrian Chancellor, by Nazi conspirators. I found the Lobby then more apprehensive than it had been. Was this, Members asked, the spark that was to set alight another world conflagration like the spark caused by the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand in 1914? The danger looked to them nearer when, on Hindenburg's death, Hitler combined in himself the office of Reich President with that of Chancellor.

Still Churchill's accounts of German rearmament continued to fall on ears reluctant to accept them. Members shrugged their shoulders at "Winston's way" and went off to tea asking sceptically where he got his figures. The House was disturbed only when official information was communicated to it at the end of 1934. Baldwin did not accept Churchill's figures and deprecated undue alarm, but he admitted that the Germans, in contravention of the Treaty of Versailles, were creating a military Air Force; and the House welcomed his explicit undertaking that under no conditions would we accept a position of inferiority.

The initials "J.R.M." emphasized the importance of the White Paper of March, 1935, on Imperial Defence. Everyone saw that it was significant of the Prime Minister's own mind. I saw no reason for surprise that the Minister who had worked so hard for disarmament should have applied his mind, when hope of disarmament failed, to precautions against aggression.

The urgent need of Defence was obvious to all parties when Hitler announced the reintroduction of conscription in Germany. This violation of the Treaty of Versailles was announced in the most cynical manner while the projected visit of

Sir John Simon and Eden to Hitler was postponed on the plea that he had a severe cold. Sir John Simon informed Parliament that the talks which he and his colleague had eventually with Hitler on a European settlement revealed "considerable divergence of view." I was told in an authoritative quarter that there was scarcely any common ground.

Parliament became inquisitive about the Stresa Conference at which Italy was associated with Great Britain and France in condemning the unilateral violation of Treaties. This, on the eve of her own aggression in Abyssinia! Was no whisper of her intention to invade that country heard by the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary? And if they had reason to suspect it did they warn Mussolini against it? And if not, why not? These questions were asked by critics, and variously answered.

Meantime feeling at Westminster against Hitler was stiffened by his disregard of our protests and by his boast to Simon that Germany had achieved parity with Great Britain in the Air. Baldwin confessed in the summer of 1935 that the estimates he gave in the previous year of Germany's growing strength were below the mark. The Government now produced a big Air programme. The pity, Mr. Churchill said, was that it had not been produced two years ago or even one year ago.

Austen Chamberlain also reproached the Government for not knowing soon enough about the strong Air Force that Germany was raising. He warned Germany that if she tried to impose her will on Europe she would find this country and the Commonwealth in her path again.

Thus he foretold what was to happen four years later when his brother was Prime Minister.

## CHAPTER XXII

### PARTNERS IN LEADERSHIP

*Veterans—The Tired Premier—Men of the Future—King George V in Westminster Hall—Lansbury's Testimony—MacDonald makes way for Baldwin—The New Cabinet—A Powerful Voice—Father and Son.*

LEADERSHIP WAS SHARED BETWEEN THE PRIME MINISTER AND BALDWIN. ALTHOUGH the ultimate responsibility lay with MacDonald it fell frequently to his chief colleague to act as leader of the House of Commons. The division of work was in keeping with a dictum that Baldwin had laid down. Although he himself was again, as in the past, to perform the double duty he used to say it would be impossible for Prime Ministers in the future to lead the Commons. The work was in his opinion too much for any human soul.

Even with the relief given by Baldwin his long and anxious spell of service as Prime Minister told eventually on MacDonald. It was with an overworked air that he said to me in the summer of 1934 he had never been so busy. Even in his fine

frame the strain was perceptible. He was tired in body and brain. His eyesight had deteriorated. He was ordered three consecutive months of relative freedom from the use of his eyes for near purposes and was advised to spend the greater part of the time abroad. That advice he took. From St. John's, Newfoundland, he sent postcards to his friends telling them that it was a wonderful holiday country.

Brain fag became evident in MacDonald's speeches at the close of his Prime Ministership. Churchill flung a gibe at his "gift of compressing the largest number of words into the smallest amount of thought." Some of his speeches were loose in construction and rambling in delivery; for a moment on one occasion he not merely lost grip of his argument but also forgot his subject. Yet he was vigorous on the platform and when attacked by the Labour Opposition he was spirited in reply.

In distinction from revolutionary Socialism he maintained his faith in progress by evolution. "A rather pathetic Victorian faith," remarked Attlee, then deputy-leader of the Labour Party.

I chatted with members about the young men who were most likely to take up the heavy burden when the older ministers laid it down. Now one, and now another, was named as a potential Prime Minister. Official good fortune did not always attend the young men of promise nor was it in their own interest to be singled out by flattering friends.

A brilliant future was predicted for Walter Elliot with his keen brain and wit; and Oliver Stanley "born in the purple," was confidently expected, with brilliance in speech and charm of manner, to add to the renown of his family. Elliot's advance was checked at the Ministry of Agriculture, the barbed wire of many careers; and it was Stanley's ill fortune as Minister of Labour to have the Parliamentary responsibility for Unemployment Assistance Regulations which provoked a storm of disapproval. Their enforced withdrawal was a humiliation for the Government and Stanley suffered in prestige, but in other offices his reputation was restored, and his friends continued to look forward to his reaching the highest place. Elliot also recovered ground.

Anthony Eden outshone rivals. He had an unique opportunity in his constant connection with the Foreign Office. Visits to Geneva and contact with statesmen in many capitals put him in the limelight, and in Parliament he played his part with distinction. He was the young Minister of the best traditional type, ambitious and industrious, elegant in appearance, point-device, attractive in manner, impressive in speech. Here and there I heard the question—had he strength and depth of character? Time would show.

I do not recall any previous period when there were so few clever, bright and aspiring young men on the back benches as in the time of the National Government. A generation had been destroyed in 1914-18; other spheres of life offered attraction to the survivors, and many who might have been candidates for Parliament were handicapped by the heavy expenditure they were required by the party organisations to undertake.

One of the few who emerged from the background was W. S. Morrison, a West Highlander at the English Bar. With intellect, a winsome manner and ready speech he took a leading place in the conferences of Conservative members; and in

the next Parliament he rose to Cabinet office and was added to the list of potential Premiers.

Labour members on the Front Opposition bench benefited by the smallness of the party led by Lansbury. Ex-Under Secretaries got unusual opportunities in the absence of defeated chiefs; and reinforced by Arthur Greenwood, who quickly found a seat, they performed their duties with assiduity. As Baldwin testified, the Opposition helped to keep the flag of Parliament flying. This tribute was due not only to the Socialists but also to the Liberals led by Sir Herbert Samuel.

Lloyd George's visits to an unresponsive House were rare and his speeches still rarer. His main, recurrent theme was the urgent need for the organisation of the resources of the country, and especially its land resources. On this subject he did not confine himself to criticism and oratorical appeals. He put before the Government a detailed comprehensive programme, prepared with the aid of experts.

MacDonald's resignation was a frequent subject of Lobby speculation in the Spring of 1935. He was reluctant to give up the helm, which had been entrusted to him by King and country. He felt bound to hold it as long as he was able. But there was a general expectation that he might give it up after the celebration of the King's Silver Jubilee.

No pageant has affected me so intimately as the scene in Westminster Hall when George V received, and responded to, the tributes of honour and affection from the Houses of Parliament. I had witnessed the celebration of Queen Victoria's Golden and Diamond Jubilees and the deeply impressive spectacle of her last voyage from Osborne, with the coffin on the *Alberta*, through lines of warships; and I had witnessed the coronation of her son and grandson, but a more direct personal appeal was made to me by the celebration of King George's Jubilee. There was no pomp in Westminster Hall; it was a family gathering of representatives of the King's subjects throughout the Empire, in which Lords and Commons were accompanied by Dominion Prime Ministers and Indian rulers.

The curtain was drawn from the Throne by the celebration at Westminster and elsewhere. There was a full revelation of the humble-minded Sovereign to the people whom he had served so faithfully, and of the personal affection of the people for the Sovereign. I knew then even better than before that, as the Prime Minister said in the House of Commons, a very human Sovereign had taken possession of our hearts. At the same time the Throne had been strengthened during his reign and fuller popular confidence had been placed in the Constitution. "The experience of the years has taught me," Lansbury confessed, "that whatever people may say or think about the British Constitution, it does work and the masses of the people are continually winning more recognition of the right to take part in the government of the country."

With the advance of democracy, so far from there being a decline in the regard for the Constitutional Monarchy, there has been, as Lansbury's testimony goes to show, a more general appreciation of its value. I recall the late 'seventies when republican sentiment was openly avowed by distinguished Radicals. Joseph Chamberlain early in his public career complacently declared that a republic would come some day, and it was boldly advocated by Sir Charles Dilke. The cool feeling

for the throne which then largely prevailed was attributed to Queen Victoria's long seclusion. That gave way to truer sympathy and warmer emotions in the later years of the great Queen's reign, as was shown at her Golden and Diamond Jubilees; and in the present century devotion to the Constitutional Monarchy has been sustained by the response of the Sovereign to the Democratic movement and by the confidence established between the Throne and Ministers of all parties and classes. In these respects as in others King George was an ideal Sovereign.

The celebrations over, there was renewed talk in the Lobby about MacDonald's resignation. Friends whispered that his decision might depend on Lord Horder's report on his health. He may have suspected what lay behind my question, when after he had been at the Palace to see the King, I asked about the physician's report. His reply that it was bad and that he was worn out convinced me that his resignation was imminent.

Nobody was surprised to hear a little later that MacDonald had given up the position which he held at the head of three Governments—the Labour Government, the Emergency Government and the National Government—for six consecutive years. Friends of the Government were pleased that he was to take office under Baldwin, in the new Prime Minister's former place as Lord President of the Council. It was to the credit of both that each should have been willing to serve under the other.

An ex-Prime Minister, Lord Rosebery wrote, was a fleeting and dangerous luxury in the Cabinet. That was not so in the case of Baldwin or MacDonald.

Would MacDonald go to the House of Lords? The question was asked in the Press and the Lobby. I assume he was offered a Peerage more than once by the King; and to have become an Earl would have been beyond the wildest dreams of the ambitious Lossie "loon." But I knew that he would never accept a title.

The Government, as reconstructed by Baldwin, was the old firm under a new name. Unfriendly observers saw a set-back to Sir John Simon in his transference from the Foreign Office to the Home Office, a position that he occupied twenty years previously, but he became deputy leader of the House. Sir Samuel Hoare's appointment as Foreign Secretary was generally approved. The Liberal element in the Cabinet was invigorated by the admission of Ernest Brown, a wide-awake politician, a tireless worker and a Parliamentarian who hit hard without making enemies and about whose strong voice many jocular stories were told.

One of the stories told by Lord Mersey in *A Picture of Life* was that a companion of Baldwin at the top of the Duke of York's Steps asked if a tremendous noise that they heard was thunder, and Baldwin said it must be Ernest Brown answering a question.

While Viscount Sankey was replaced on the Woolsack by Viscount Hailsham, National Labour had a new Cabinet Minister in Malcolm MacDonald.

It was rare for father and son to sit in the same Cabinet. There was the occasion when the son of Lord Derby, the "Rupert of Debate," held office under him. There was the case also of the Chamberlains. Austen entered the Balfour Cabinet some months before his father left it.

## CHAPTER XXIII

### BALDWIN'S TURN AGAIN

*The 1935 Election—Sir Stafford Cripps—Single Bench for Liberals—Hoare-Laval Crisis—Storm in Parliament—“Thrown to the Wolves”—The Rhineland—League Council in London—Ribbentrop—“Very midsummer of madness”—Spanish Civil War—Churchill’s unheeded Warnings—Complacency—“Appalling Frankness”—The Abdication—Baldwin’s Prestige.*

THE PARLIAMENT, ELECTED IN 1935 WITH A REDUCED BUT STILL OVERWHELMING majority of 250 for the Government, which it won on a League of Nations and Collective Security policy, was as distinctly Baldwin's Parliament as any Parliament had been Gladstone's or Disraeli's. Churchill, still left out of office, was generous enough to say that Baldwin had gathered to himself a greater volume of confidence and good will than any other public man in his time.

The short titles of Prime Ministers have been various. Gladstone was "Mr. G." to his lieutenants; and to Press and public in his later years the "G.O.M." Balfour was "Arthur" to friends in all quarters. Campbell-Bannerman was "C.B.," just as Lloyd George has been from one generation to another "L.G." Only to his intimate circle was Asquith "Henry"; to others while he held the highest office he was "the P.M." Other Prime Ministers were called by their Christian names in Lobby talk. Bonar Law was invariably "Bonar"; Ramsay MacDonald was usually "Ramsay"; Stanley Baldwin was spoken of affectionately as "Stanley"; Neville Chamberlain was always "Neville."

The Labour party had in the new Parliament nearly three times the number of members it had in the last. Most of its Ministers, defeated in 1931, were returned. Attlee, who had proved his ability as deputy-leader in the interval, was elected Chairman of the party when Lansbury resigned the position. He had a cool, resolute brain and was a watchful, unrelenting critic of the Government. For hours he would sit crouched on the front Opposition bench but when he saw his opportunity he sprang up and hit out in sharp, animated speech.

Sir Stafford Cripps, the ablest debater that the Socialists had enlisted for some years, moved from their front bench to an independent seat below the gangway. He irritated the House by his extreme Left-Wing views, but even opponents who had met him in private life spoke to me of his attractive character. He was a generous man, and although he made a large income at the Bar he led a simple, modest life.

The independent Liberals were again disappointed. Although Lloyd George gave them the benefit of his electioneering talent through the Council of Action for Peace and Reconstruction they mustered only about a score.

For those of us who recalled the great days of Gladstone, Campbell-Bannerman and Asquith it was pathetic to see the Liberals accommodated on a single bench. Sir Herbert Samuel lost his seat and Sir Archibald Sinclair, an aristocrat true to

Liberal ideals, a resolute fighter and a fine orator, became the leader of the party. Lloyd George sat on the front Opposition bench ready to drop bombs on the Government.

"You are unchanged," L.G. said to me in the Lobby. "And so are you," I said in admiration of his Parliamentary powers. Cabinet Ministers who had no reason to love him ruefully testified that his oratorical gifts were unimpaired. His voice and gestures defied the abhorred approach of old age.

The third and last Baldwin régime was notable not only for the Premier's manner of meeting the menace of German rearmament but also for two events which immediately affected his personal reputation. One was the Hoare-Laval episode; the other was the monarchical crisis.

When Italy waged war on Abyssinia, Anthony Eden, who had been raised to Cabinet rank as Minister for League of Nations affairs, took the lead in securing the League decision in favour of Economic Sanctions against the aggressor. There was protracted controversy in Parliament on a policy which provoked Mussolini, but was not carried far enough to be effective. While the Opposition parties and a group of Conservatives pressed day after day for bold action the main body of the Government's supporters held that we should not act alone; and unanimity was impossible in the League on an oil embargo which Mussolini threatened to regard as an act involving war. But feeling against the aggressor was strong in every quarter.

I never saw since Lord Randolph Churchill's sudden resignation in 1886, such panic in a Government camp as was caused by the plan to end the hostilities in Abyssinia on which Sir Samuel Hoare agreed with the agile-minded French Minister, Laval, in December, 1935. The agreement was arrived at in Paris when the British Foreign Secretary was on his way to Switzerland.

Rumours of the plan, on coming across the Channel, were received with bewilderment and incredulity. A violent storm broke out when the terms, involving the partition of Abyssinia between Italy and the Emperor, were published. Dismayed supporters of the Government who had been elected on a policy of Collective Resistance to all acts of unprovoked aggression asked if the Prime Minister knew about the Plan beforehand. No one was more surprised and distressed by it than the most important of his colleagues.

The life of the Government was in jeopardy. Its best friends were among its severest critics. Austen Chamberlain at a meeting in a Committee room denounced the Pact. A large body of Conservatives were as determined as Socialists and Liberals not to weaken the League or reward the aggressor. The Cabinet met on three successive days to consider the situation, while protests grew in force.

"My lips are not yet unsealed," Baldwin declared in the discussion which was immediately raised. "Were those troubles over I would make a case and I guarantee that not a man would go into the Lobby against us." This mystery annoyed the House. What did it mean? members asked impatiently.

I was told in the Whips' room at the end of a troubled, anxious day that Sir Samuel Hoare had resigned. It was obvious that his resignation relieved embarrassed colleagues. At the same time Sir Samuel Hoare hurried home to defend his conduct. His nose had been broken by an accident in Switzerland and was still in plaster when he made his resignation speech from below the Ministerial gangway.

There was personal sympathy with the retired Minister who had been "thrown to the wolves," and the House appreciated the restraint and dignity of his statement. In fear of a European conflagration or of isolated war between Great Britain and Italy, Sir Samuel Hoare had agreed to put the Paris plan before the Cabinet, holding that it was essential to maintain Anglo-French solidarity and hinting plainly that if we became involved in war in the Mediterranean we could not depend on assistance. Our military precautions had been applauded, but not imitated. "Not a ship, not a machine, not a man had been moved by any other member of the League."

The emotion that Hoare felt in his abandonment by colleagues was expressed in the closing passage of his speech. It was seen also in his face. He sobbed as he walked out.

I thought that the Prime Minister's lips might now be "unsealed." But no; he made no startling revelation. He bowed to the storm. He confessed that instead of agreeing to endorse what Hoare had done he should have called him back for examination of the Paris proposals. These proposals, the House was relieved to hear, were now "absolutely and completely" dead.

The Prime Minister's prestige suffered greatly by his loose handling of the affair but he was rescued from disaster by a party division. Now that the obnoxious Plan was dead the followers of the Government had no desire to turn Baldwin and his colleagues out. Austen Chamberlain came in these circumstances to the assistance of the Ministers. As Churchill said, Austen had long been the buttress of the Government and now was its saviour.

The European conflagration dreaded by Sir Samuel Hoare seemed imminent early in 1936 when Germany not only infringed again the Treaty of Versailles but also repudiated the Locarno Agreement, into which she had freely entered, by marching into the demilitarized Rhineland.

Politicians here were astounded by this audacious act of defiance. What would the French do, everyone asked? Would they allow their first line of defence to be captured? Or would they force Hitler to withdraw his troops? I think there was widespread relief when the moments of suspense ended without the sword being drawn. At the same time there was surprise that France did not fight. She appealed to the League.

London became a sort of Geneva through the meeting here of the Council of the League. Journalists from every Continent assembled in St. James's Palace where they heard through loudspeakers in rooms adjoining the Council Chamber the addresses which were promptly printed and circulated. Herr von Ribbentrop, on Germany being assured of equality of status, came as Hitler's representative. His argument did not save the treaty-breaker from the condemnation of the League. But what did Hitler care for that!

This was the first time I saw Ribbentrop. I have a note in my diary about his arrogant aspect and domineering voice. His subsequent appointment as Ambassador inspired little hope. At his presentation to the King he gave the Nazi salute—an impertinence which amazed other diplomatists. In his visits to the Foreign Office he spent much of his time dilating on the dangers of Bolshevism.

Sanctions against Italy continued to be discussed when the war in Abyssinia was practically over. Politicians who disregarded Mussolini's antagonism urged that the Sanctions should be continued and even intensified, in the belief that it might

\* still be possible to preserve the independence of Abyssinia. Neville Chamberlain at a dinner of the 1900 Club described that notion as the "very mid-summer of madness."

An outcry was raised in Parliament by those who resented Chamberlain's declaration and thought that he was trying to force the hand of the Cabinet. They assumed that if his view prevailed Eden, the ardent champion of the League who had succeeded Sir Samuel Hoare as Foreign Secretary, would resign. But a week later Eden announced that the Government, on his advice, had decided that there was no longer any utility in continuing Sanctions.

This decision was stigmatized by the Opposition as an exhibition of weakness. Lloyd George sweeping his arms across the table and glaring at the Ministers cried, "*There are the cowards.*"

Daily scores of questions and heated debates sprang out of the Spanish Civil War. As we pursued with the French the policy of non-intervention, the Government placed an embargo on the export of war material, but the Opposition persistently demanded that we should allow it to be sold to the Government of Spain, in view of the fact that Italian and German "volunteers" were assisting General Franco. Sinister developments led to the exchange by the French and British Ministers of assurances of aid in the event of unprovoked aggression. Parliamentary observers of the international situation gravely noted the rapprochement between Germany and Italy, the creation of the Axis and the adhesion of Italy to the Pact formed by Germany and Japan against the Communist International at Moscow.

Churchill session after session in the new Parliament as in the last repeated his warning of the gigantic war machine constructed in Germany. At the close of 1936 he foresaw a great growth of factors adverse to this country. But even then he failed to disturb the complacency of Ministerialists. He came to his place and delivered his impressive speeches. They were listened to with the interest always given to an oratorical star. But in the Lobby complacent Members soothed their consciences by calling him a filibuster and panic-monger.

Open-minded men on his own side wished that Churchill had been taken into the Government and instead of Sir Thomas Inskip appointed Minister for the Co-ordination of Defence. Sir Thomas Inskip was an able, hard-working, clear-minded, much-respected man, but he was not specially fitted to make up in our defences for the years that in his biblical phrase "the locust hath eaten." Prejudice against Churchill was shown when he pressed repeatedly for the appointment of a Minister of Supply. Members ready to impute selfish motives suggested that he wanted the job for himself.

They accused him of intrigue, but that was a fault of which Churchill was never guilty. He never said or did anything which he did not say or do in full view of Parliament and the country. He did not court popularity. In that respect he was the aristocrat. Of course he wanted power but, conscious of his strength, he went his own way. All that could be done by speech in Parliament was done by Churchill to awaken it to a sense of the country's danger.

Even complacent members, styled "Yes men," were staggered by Baldwin's reason for the Government not starting rearmament in 1933-34 instead of waiting for an Election mandate. He presented the reason with what he called "appalling frankness." His audience was certainly appalled by his attributing the delay to the

existence of a pacifist Democracy and by his argument that a Democracy was always two years behind a Dictator. Critics reminded him that responsibility lay on the Government for the safety of the country.

The most sensational domestic event in our modern history put everything else for a few days in the background. When the word Abdication fell on the sceptical ear Edward VIII had been less than a year on the throne. At his father's death all parties in Parliament joined in good will and high hopes for the new King, who as Prince of Wales had won unbounded popularity.

My eye was arrested by a change in the House of Lords when he began to reign. The throne occupied by Queen Alexandra and Queen Mary had been removed. There remained only the Sovereign's own throne. Would not a Queen, I wondered, sit by the young King's side? That vision was dispelled soon after he delivered his only speech from the throne at the opening of Parliament in November, 1936.

"The biggest constitutional crisis for centuries," a well-informed friend whispered to me in the Lobby when it was buzzing over the Bishop of Bradford's disturbing diocesan address. I knew from gossip which had come across the Atlantic what my friend meant: and by and by everybody was talking about the King's intention to marry Mrs. Simpson. Parliament was naturally excited by the constitutional question that was raised and although it appreciated the reasons for reserve it was impatient to know what steps, if any, the Government was taking. As *The Times* pointed out, the American lady in question had two former husbands living, from whom she had obtained divorce, the *decreet nisi* in the second case being quite recent. The idea of her becoming Queen was on that account rejected by the King's loyal subjects.

The suggestion was made to Baldwin and was, at the King's wish, put formally before the Cabinet and the Prime Ministers of the Dominions, that an Act should be passed enabling the lady whom the King married to be his wife without having the position of Queen. In a statement applauded by the House of Commons the Prime Minister dismissed that suggestion.

What then would His Majesty do? In the Lobby there was hourly speculation as to whether he would give up the lady or the throne. Reluctantly the opinion grew that he would abdicate.

Full opportunity was given to the King to weigh a decision, vitally important to himself and his subjects. Churchill irritated the House by pleading—it was thought unnecessarily—for delay before an irrevocable step was taken. Ultimately he admitted, as the Prime Minister proved, that the King took the decision to abdicate freely, voluntarily and spontaneously in his own time and his own way. Till the last hour, as a Cabinet minute revealed to Parliament, the Ministers appealed to His Majesty to reconsider it.

I felt the thrill of a unique moment in history when in the closely packed and suddenly hushed House on December 10, the Prime Minister stood at the bar and, holding up the fateful document, announced a message from the King, signed by His Majesty's own hand. Most of those present may have accurately anticipated its contents but some clung to the hope that His Majesty was not to go. A moment more and the truth was known. Members, with quivering faces, listened in awed silence as the Speaker read the declaration of His Majesty's final and irrevocable decision to renounce the Throne. A gasp relieved the House when the message ended. Many women in the Gallery behind me, and some men, sobbed.

An age was crowded at Westminster into a day. Within twenty-two hours the Bill, in the preparation of which Sir John Simon, I understand, took the principal part, giving effect to the Abdication and to the succession of the Duke of York, became an Act of Parliament. The giving of the royal assent by Commission to the Act was King Edward's own last function as Sovereign. With painful emotion, Peers and Commons, assembled in the House of Lords, heard the formula repeated in his name *le Roy le veult*. Six months later, the ex-King, henceforth known as His Royal Highness the Duke of Windsor, the title conferred on him by the first royal act of his successor, was married in France to the lady for whom he gave up the Throne.

Two throned chairs were seen again in the House of Lords, at the opening of the new reign. With Queen Elizabeth as helpmeet, and loyally encouraged by all classes, King George VI took up the task which devolved on him in unprecedented circumstances.

Sentimental people asked if the Prime Minister did everything possible to avert Abdication. I gathered from M.P.s who visited their constituencies that the doubters rapidly became a negligible number. There was no popular toasting of "the King over the water." An example was given to the country by the House of Commons—it was convinced that the Prime Minister showed the utmost consideration to King Edward, while safeguarding the Throne and the Constitution.

Baldwin's prestige which had flopped and fallen in the Hoare-Laval crisis, was restored by his handling of the monarchical problem. His hold not only on the confidence of his own party but also on the personal esteem of the House was now as great as at any period of his career.

## CHAPTER XXIV

### A TORY DEMOCRAT

*Assessment of Baldwin—Woman Moves Address—Personal Forecasts—Lord Hugh Cecil leaves the Commons—"Jim" Thomas Retires—A Long Sitting—The Red Flag Sung—"Safety Before Comfort" Budget—Ministers' and Members' Salaries—Baldwin's Exit—Ramsay MacDonald's Last Voyage.*

I THINK BALDWIN WAS ONE OF THE BEST LEADERS THAT THE HOUSE OF COMMONS has ever had. He watched it closely and was a good listener. Fault-finders accused him of inertia and said he lounged on the Treasury bench when he should have been directing the work of the Government in his room or in Downing Street, but the House appreciated his attention. In his handling of it there was the instinctive "Baldwin touch." Although he did not mix much with back benchers and seldom lingered in the Lobby, he made himself acquainted with the personnel. When a member unknown to him caught the Speaker's eye he would take "Dod" from the table, put the volume to his face with a familiar gesture, as if sniffing it, and study the member's record.

His statesmanship in dealing with the international peril exposed him to severe censure in later times, but in the domestic field by his education of the party which he led for fourteen years Stanley Baldwin made a Progressive mark on political

history. He gave the death blow to the Die-hards. The Conservatives of the early 'eighties when I became a Parliamentary chronicler would not recognise present-day Conservatives as their true descendants. Even before the first Great War shook political foundations Conservatives were more advanced than the Liberals were in Gladstone's time.

I have shown how Baldwin boldly led them forward. Some of them did not admit that in the strides they took they were following their party's traditions. But they appreciated the tribute that their leader paid to Disraeli as the pioneer of social reform. Baldwin saw that spirit in *Sybil: or The Two Nations*, and he would not desire a better monument to himself than recognition of the effort that he made for the uniting of the classes.

Democracy was the subject of many of his reflections. He dwelt on the priceless value of Freedom of Speech and Liberty of Conscience. "If," he said, "we once lost our democratic liberties we lost our character, we lost our soul." He insisted on an enlightened understanding of the system, declaring that the success of democracy depended on everyone realizing his responsibility. The rival ideologies of the Continent were warned off British ground by Baldwin, and he impressed upon his fellow-countrymen that Fascism and Communism bred one another.

The Fascist movement led by Sir Oswald Mosley excited scarcely any sympathy in any quarter in Parliament except when the Communists were as disorderly as his violent Black Shirts. A check was placed on the aggressive marches of Mosley's young men which had resulted in clashes with Communists and Jews and other sections of the community in the East End of London and elsewhere. While legitimate freedom of speech and of assembly was preserved a ban was laid on processions in certain areas; and the wearing of uniforms by political organisations was prohibited by the Public Order Act of 1936.

An interesting little mark in Parliamentary annals was, by the way, made during Baldwin's leadership when a woman for the first time moved the Address in reply to the King's Speech. Miss Florence Horsbrugh, who was entrusted with this much prized duty, had distinguished herself in debate and in the work of the House, and had done platform service to the Conservative party. It was gallantly—and truly—said by men that she performed her new duty better than many members of their own sex.

As the time for Baldwin's retirement drew near I heard more talk in the Lobby about potential successors. Sir Samuel Hoare, who was appointed to the Admiralty six months after he resigned the Foreign Office, was a might-be Prime Minister, but even those who admired his Parliamentary qualities doubted if he could make a popular appeal. Sir John Simon would not be acceptable to the Conservatives who insisted on a member of their own party having the chief place. Runciman who would earlier have had strong backing on account of his political capacity and courage and trenchant speech lost any chance of becoming Prime Minister when his father in old age accepted a Peerage to which, of course, he would himself succeed. Eden could not be forgotten in personal forecasts. But his time was not yet.

It became distinctly clearer that Neville Chamberlain's succession to Baldwin was inevitable. Already there was evidence that he was the driving force in the Cabinet.

From men mounting on the political ladder I turn to one or two whose *rôles* in the one House or the other had ended. Lord Carson's death in 1935 left a conspicuous blank in his generation. The last time I saw him was at a Conservative party conference when, frail in body but robust in spirit, he attacked the Government's Indian policy.

The House of Commons lost one of its most distinguished figures when Lord Hugh Cecil was appointed Provost of Eton. At the beginning of the century he was the rising hope of the Tory Party, but with a full share of the independence and Church zeal of his family he left the beaten track of the politically ambitious. His day and generation had passed by this time and in the last year or two he went in and out of the House, with characteristic swing on his toes, looking as if he knew nobody and feared to arouse the dead. Lord Hugh (later Lord Quickswood) left few intellectual equals among the Commons and few equals in moving speech and piercing power in debate.

A step that everybody considered necessary and everybody regretted was taken when "Jim" Thomas resigned his place in the Government and his seat in the House. The tribunal which enquired into Budget leakage in 1936 found an unauthorized disclosure of information by J. H. Thomas. He assured the House that he never consciously gave a secret away but he recognized that the House must accept the finding of the tribunal. Members followed him with sympathetic eyes when, after a personal statement, he walked out. I could well believe that it was the darkest hour of his life.

A year or two more of Peace was spent on national reconstruction and social reform. I recall the raising of the school-leaving age, the reorganisation of the coal industry, the unification of mining royalties under national control, the improvement of trunk roads, the clearance of slums and abatement of overcrowding, the regulation of work in the factories and the relief of the distressed areas. The Matrimonial Causes Act, enlarging the grounds for divorce, was the work of private members and especially A. P. Herbert.

The longest sitting since 1881 was held in July, 1936. Unemployment Assistance was the subject of contention. It lasted thirty-six hours in a turbulent atmosphere. Three Clydesiders were suspended, and one refused to leave until approached by the Serjeant-at-Arms. When the Closure was applied Socialists sang "The Red Flag."

The year 1937 opened with trade recovery and hopeful prospects at home, but gathering clouds darkened the international outlook.

The long-delayed era of rearmament on a great scale was at last apparently entered upon, though not yet at a sufficient pace, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer sought legislative authority to raise capital, or realize Budget surpluses, for the Defence Services to the amount of 400 millions in five years. The House was startled by the amount. It received another shock from the statement in a White Paper that it would be imprudent to contemplate defence expenditure of less than 1,500 millions. Even that figure, Neville Chamberlain warned the House, could not be regarded as final.

"Safety Before Comfort" was the key to his Budget in 1936. We live in times, he said, which recall

"The uncertain glory of an April day  
Which now shows all the beauty of the sun  
And by and by a cloud takes all away."

The cloud became darker in 1937 and the necessity of provision for safety was still more emphatically the dominating note of Chamberlain's sixth and last Budget that year.

On the eve of the vacancy in the Prime Ministership he caused a disagreeable flutter among political friends. As a Contribution to National Defence he proposed a tax on the *growth* of profits. Leaders of industry denounced that form of impost because it would check enterprise and some of them on the Conservative side threatened, in their heat, to oppose Chamberlain's promotion. As the result of inquiry about its operation he withdrew the proposal and substituted a tax on profits, simpler in method though with an even larger yield, which was carried into effect by the next Chancellor.

The opportunity was taken by the Government, when Baldwin was about to retire, to carry out the long-advocated readjustment of Ministers' salaries. Some of the hardest worked Ministers, the heads of new Departments, got only £2,000 whereas colleagues got £5,000. It was decided that all members of the Cabinet should be paid £5,000, except the Prime Minister whose salary was raised to £10,000. The Lord Chancellor was to continue to receive £10,000 for his joint judicial and political services.

The increase of the Prime Minister's own remuneration had been specially called for by the House of Commons. It was considered a discredit to the country that men in the highest position should have left Downing Street, as was the case of Asquith and others, poorer than when they entered it. Even after the institution of the Hospitality Fund the Prime Minister entertained, at his own table and expense, visitors whom it was desirable for him to meet more intimately than at a public banquet.

A pension of £2,000 a year was allotted to ex-Prime Ministers. In former days when a certain number of pensions, of different amounts, were available, an ex-member of Government received one if he claimed it on the ground of insufficient private means, but the system had been for some years in abeyance. There were at this time only two ex-Ministers, both of them Peers, who had drawn a pension, and they had given it up when their private income improved. Under the new arrangement an ex-Premier became entitled automatically to a pension, without a means test.

The salary of £2,000 to the Leader of the Opposition was an innovation justified by modern conditions. His job was an all-time job, and a poor man could not perform it without assistance. The Labour Party was divided on the subject of the salary, but its Front Bench spokesman, Lees-Smith, commended the principle as democratic. It was Baldwin's own proposal.

Immediately before leaving office he had the pleasure of announcing the Cabinet decision to increase the salary of members of the House to £600.

Baldwin's exit from the House was undramatic. His speech in debate on a mining dispute was not expected to be his last. Few of his official colleagues came to hear it. But it was appropriately his "last appeal" to masters and men to justify democracy by peace in industry.

Members saw Baldwin for the last time as Prime Minister in the division lobby. He slipped away without their knowing that he was to go. All were pleased to hear, on his resignation, that the King had conferred on him the Order of the Garter with an Earldom.

Earl Baldwin and Viscount Samuel, formerly Sir Herbert, took their seats in the House of Lords on the same afternoon. The Earl was extremely nervous during the elaborate ceremony. I happened to be in the doorway when he was waiting for a friend. "This," he murmured, "is the most nerve-racking business that I have ever gone through." Viscount Samuel was as cool as a cucumber.

I was told that Earl Baldwin, on being asked by someone what he would do in his retirement, replied by saying what he would *not* do. He would not speak to the man at the wheel and he would not spit on the deck! So I was told in the Lobby, first by one and then by another of the Earl's friends. Many years previously he amused us all by saying that his ambition on retirement was to read the books he wanted to read, to live a decent life—and to keep pigs!

Ramsay MacDonald, without any title or decoration, retired along with Baldwin. For the first time since he was elected leader of the Opposition in 1922 he sat on a back bench. He chose the corner below the Ministerial gangway usually occupied by distinguished ex-Ministers.

Soon he set out on his last voyage. "It is not well for a man," he once said, "to go straight from the workshop to the grave." He wished for days of leisure as a spectator of events, and I gathered from him when I found him at Hampstead repairing the binding of his books that he contemplated a sort of political autobiography. But his death on the steamer on the way to South America was an ideal death.

His work was done and he found rest. His body was brought from Bermuda in a cruiser. The offer of burial in Westminster Abbey for MacDonald was declined by his family. His body was cremated after the funeral service in the Abbey and the ashes were interred among his own people in Spynie Churchyard. That, as he had told me with deep feeling, was his wish.

## CHAPTER XXV

### CHAMBERLAIN THE THIRD

*Austen Chamberlain's Death—Neville's Fear of Avalanche—Halifax and Hitler—Talks with Mussolini—Eden's Resignation—Halifax Foreign Secretary—Surprise at Downing Street Luncheon—Appeasement Policy—A Birthday Tribute—Agreement with Eire—Churchill's Prediction—A Member Slapped.*

AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN, AT THE PEAK OF HIS REPUTATION AND INFLUENCE, DIED A FEW weeks before his brother was appointed Prime Minister. At one point in their career their paths divided. That was when Neville accepted office under Bonar Law, the puller down of the Coalition of which Austen was a pillar. But their warm personal affection survived their political difference and even this did not last long. They served together under Baldwin, and Austen looked forward with pride to his brother attaining the position which neither he himself nor their father filled.

There had been some speculation as to the composition of Neville Chamberlain's Government. Would it be less of a "National" character than the last? It proved to be on the same basis as Baldwin's. Although predominantly Conservative, it included members of the other parties. Chamberlain's principal lieutenants were

Sir John Simon who succeeded him as Chancellor of the Exchequer and Sir Samuel Hoare who succeeded Simon as Home Secretary. Eden remained Foreign Secretary with Viscount Halifax, the Lord President of the Council, in an advisory rôle.

The new Prime Minister took closer direction of foreign policy than his predecessor and was determined in the pursuit of appeasement. He removed Sir Robert Vansittart, who was so strongly anti-German, from the position of Permanent Under-Secretary at the Foreign Office. In picturesque phrases in his first speech in the House on the subject he exposed the danger of the international situation. An incautious word, or even a loud exclamation might, he said, start an avalanche. Let us try, he urged, to keep cool heads and neither do nor say anything to precipitate a disaster. Lloyd George was not satisfied with cool heads. He wanted also stout hearts.

Members who considered the Government policy too conciliatory put little faith in the "Gentleman's Agreement" between Great Britain and Italy to respect one another's rights in the Mediterranean. Nor were they surprised by the unprofitable conversation that Lord Halifax, who accepted an invitation to a hunting exhibition in Berlin, had with Hitler at the end of 1937. Hitler told Lord Halifax that it was useless to try to improve Anglo-German relations so long as the British Parliament and Press were free to criticise Germany. "If that is your idea of what must be done," Lord Halifax said, "I think I have wasted my time and yours."

Air raid precautions were proceeded with slowly. There was protracted delay in negotiations between the Government and the Local Authorities. Discussions in Parliament, conferences of the Municipalities and deputations to Ministers went on from session to session.

Rumours of disagreement between Eden and the Prime Minister in February, 1938, surprised the Parliamentary Lobby. Was there to be another change at the Foreign Office a year after the last? What could be the cause? Soon the whisper spread that the Foreign Secretary disapproved of talks with Mussolini.

A Saturday Cabinet was an ominous sign. The crisis must be serious, I knew, when the Cabinet sat on Sunday—from 3 o'clock (with intervals) till 10. 30. At that hour I saw Eden, with a resolute air, hurry across Downing Street from No. 10 to the Foreign Office, and later I heard that he had resigned. It had been rumoured that young members of the Cabinet supported him, but none of them came out of office. Eden was followed only by Viscount Cranborne, the Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, who displayed character worthy of a Cecil.

A member of the Government suggested to me that perhaps it required as much courage to stay in as to come out.

The eyes of the Opposition glittered when the House was informed that the issue between the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister on the opportuneness of conversations with Italy was not an isolated one. There was between them, as Eden revealed, a real difference in outlook and method.

He held that Mussolini's attitude to international problems in general and to this country in particular did not justify conversations at this time. That contention was warmly applauded by the Opposition parties. The whole House was shocked by Eden's suggestion that Italy had called on us to enter on conversations "now or never." Viscount Cranborne bluntly accused the Government of surrender to blackmail. The Prime Minister assured the House that these allegations were

unjustified and his Cabinet colleagues also denied that they had acted under duress. Chamberlain's view was that if we desired to have conversations the sooner we had them the better.

The two most powerful critics joined in protests. Churchill lamented that we had set up again on a pinnacle the Duce, when he was near to collapse, and Lloyd George declared that the Dictators had won a great triumph in driving Eden out of office. It reminded me how the German Government brought about the dismissal of Delcassé, the French Minister, in consequence of his share in the Anglo-French Entente.

Eden became the hope and hero of the Opposition parties, hitherto his severe censors; and Churchill saw in him the one fresh figure of first magnitude arising out of the generation which was ravaged by the War. Supporters of the Government, on the other hand, thought that there was not sufficient reason for his resignation. Some of them attributed it to pique at Chamberlain's control of his Department.

Prime Ministers' names in the past have been given to foreign policy. There was Palmerston's, for instance; there was Disraeli's and there was Gladstone's. For everything done while he was Prime Minister Chamberlain had personal credit or discredit. His name was directly attached to it.

The appointment of Lord Halifax as Eden's successor was criticised, not at all on account of his personal qualities but because he was a Peer. Indians called him a saint when he was Viceroy. Supercilious people at home called him prim and old-maidish. But he was a man of high capacity as well as high character, with devout religious spirit.

Objection from the House of Commons to a Peer as Foreign Secretary was met by the Prime Minister dealing personally with the major questions. The day-by-day questions were left safely to R. A. Butler, the clever Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs, a stone-waller when caution was necessary, but who, when he got a loose ball, hit out hard.

When Ribbentrop on becoming Hitler's Foreign Minister in 1938 came to present to the King his Letters of Recall as Ambassador he spent over two hours with Lord Halifax. I was told that, as at other interviews at the Foreign Office, he did most of the talking. He did not listen.

There was a disturbing surprise for his host when Ribbentrop was lunching with the Prime Minister. News came of the Nazi coercion of Austria, the obvious prelude to her seizure. It had been supposed that Austria was protected by the friendship of Italy, but Mussolini was bribed with Abyssinia. Both Chamberlain and Halifax spoke to Ribbentrop of the grave reactions of the new despotic exercise of brute force and its deplorable effects on Anglo-German relations.

I felt as if I were living again in the summer of 1914. The dark clouds became more and more threatening. It was suspected from Nazi propaganda that Hitler's next object of aggression would be Czecho-Slovakia. We were not specifically bound to assist France to implement her Treaty obligations to that country, but the Prime Minister, while refusing to give a prior guarantee of intervention, stated that in the event of war it would be unlikely to be confined to those who had assumed specific obligations.

Various sections of the House as they watched the Nazi proceedings were more militant in temper than the Ministers. Uneasy rumours about Chamberlain's tendency to appeasement were heard even on his own side. An increasing number

of members agreed with Churchill on the necessity of standing up to the Dictators. "If we don't stand up to them now," he argued, "where shall we be a year hence; where shall we be in 1940?" His policy was "Arm and stand by the Covenant."

A few young Conservatives also, in spite of the frowns of Whips and docile colleagues, raised critical voices. I was specially interested in Ronald Cartland, a Birmingham member who risked his political life by his independence. He wrote to me in December, 1938, thanking me for my references to him in the *Daily Mail Year Book*. "I only hope," he said, "that I shall come up to your expectations in the future." That future was not to be as I imagined it. A life full of promise was given up to the country on the battlefield.

In spite of discontents and misgivings there was no reason for Chamberlain to be dissatisfied with the attitude of his party as a whole. They shared responsibility for his policy. When a movement was attempted by a few men for his deposition party discipline and personal friendship easily prevailed. Indeed nearly all the nominal supporters of the Government joined in presenting the Prime Minister on his birthday with a round-robin of whole-hearted respect, admiration and confidence.

They were delighted by his replies to Labour attacks. There were thirteen debates on foreign affairs in nine weeks, and in his encounters with assailants on the Opposition side Chamberlain revealed trenchant qualities which he had not previously displayed.

I wrote to him to say that his speeches at this time in spirit and delivery reminded me of his father's. Here is his reply: "Your letter has given me the greatest pleasure. I have never attempted to challenge a comparison with my father but the fact that you who were so familiar with his manner of speech, gestures and general political attitude should have found something of an echo in me is singularly gratifying to me. I am grateful to you for writing. Yours sincerely, N. Chamberlain."

The Anglo-Italian Agreement of 1938 on the Mediterranean and the Near East, conditional on the withdrawal of Italian "volunteers" from Spain and our recognition of Italian sovereignty in Ethiopia, was the subject of acute controversy. It was distrusted and disliked by the Opposition. On the other hand, in the view of the Government's supporters, it justified the Premier's conversations with Mussolini.

Further evidence of Chamberlain's diplomacy in removing or lessening differences was seen in the agreement with Eire. The way to the conference between Eire and British Ministers in Downing Street had been prepared by long conversations between de Valera and Malcolm MacDonald, the Secretary of State for the Dominions, who had the faculty of inspiring confidence and good will. On the question of the union of Ulster with Southern Ireland no compromise was possible, but agreement between the Governments was reached on the financial question, trade and coastal defence. The surrender to the Eire Government of our Treaty rights over the strategic ports, Queenstown, Berehaven and Lough Swilly was a concession that we had reason to lament.

Churchill foresaw the danger. He anticipated that in a war in which Great Britain was engaged with a powerful nation Eire might be neutral. The ports might be denied to us in the hour of need, and we would have no right to retake them. "You are," Churchill told the Government, "casting away real and important means of security and survival for vain shadows—and for ease."

• A lamentable personal incident, which stunned the House, took place during a noisy altercation at question time. Shinwell, who defeated Ramsay MacDonald at Seaham, crossed from the Opposition front bench, went up to Commander Bower, who was seated at the gangway on the other side, and with the open palm of the hand slapped him on the cheek.

Commander Bower had enraged Shinwell, when engaged in a foreign affairs controversy, by shouting "Go back to Poland." Shinwell resented the imputation in the jeer; he was, as he subsequently stated, a British subject, born in this country.

I should not have been surprised if his blow at Commander Bower had provoked a struggle on the floor of the House. Members in all quarters commended the self-restraint of the Commander (a former heavy-weight naval champion) in not retaliating. Shinwell apologized to the Speaker and to the House, and Commander Bower expressed regret for an exclamation which, he admitted, might have been regarded as provocative. The incident ended with a rebuke from the Chair, and next day the Speaker, in an impressive statement, gave a warning that a similar incident could not occur without fear of consequent punishment.

## CHAPTER XXVI

### A VAIN QUEST

*The Appeasement Umbrella—"Hysterical" Scene in Parliament—"Peace for Our Time"—Churchill the Prophet—Foreboding—Good-bye to Munich—A Momentous Decision—Conscription—The Peace Front—Eyes on Moscow—New Friendliness for Churchill—A Painful Surprise—Our Position Clear.*

I WAS OLD ENOUGH TO REMEMBER DISRAELI'S DRAMATIC MOVES AT THE BERLIN CONGRESS and now I watched the encounter of another British statesman with a German dictator. I wondered if the son of Joseph Chamberlain, on whom Disraeli looked down with curiosity from the Peers' Gallery in the House of Commons, would, like the famous Tory leader, bring home "Peace with Honour."

Could war be averted? That was the question we asked each other in the summer and autumn of 1938, when the Nazis were threatening Czecho-Slovakia. It was not surprising that Viscount Runciman's efforts at mediation between the Sudeten Germans and the Czech Government failed, seeing that Hitler was behind the Sudetens with his Army and wanted their future settled in his own way.

Parliament was thrilled and the imagination of the whole country was stirred when Neville Chamberlain on a Peace adventure set out by air for the first time in his life. All followed anxiously his flight, in that memorable September, to Germany.

The umbrella that he carried became emblematic. It became as characteristic a trait in the cartoonist's eye as Disraeli's curl, Gladstone's high collar, Joseph Chamberlain's orchid and monocle, Baldwin's pipe or Churchill's cigar and hat.

I am not going to repeat the story of the Prime Minister's three-hour interview with Hitler at Berchtesgaden and the second meeting at Godesberg. It is enough to say that after Berchtesgaden Anglo-French proposals for the cession of Sudeten territory, which pacifiers considered inevitable, were accepted by the Czech

Government, but at Godesberg Hitler stiffened his terms as to the way in which the areas were to be handed over, and made peremptory demands which were rejected at Prague.

Peace or War, in the hourly repeated phrase, trembled in the balance. A period of extreme anxiety ensued. The mobilisation of the Navy was ordered; a state of emergency was declared; trenches were dug in the parks; gas masks were distributed.

Members with whom I spoke later showed no satisfaction in looking back on the ecstatic scene—cynics called it the hysterical scene—when the P.M. at the end of a speech, after reading a note from Lord Halifax, handed to him by Sir John Simon, announced that he was going, with Mussolini and Daladier, to meet Hitler at Munich. There was certainly effusive approval of his decision. All parties rose and cheered rapturously: strangers joined in the applause: leading opponents of his policy shook hands with Chamberlain. At last he was to stand up to Hitler! So some of them may have thought. Anyhow a settlement seemed to be possible when he was to meet the Dictator once more.

I cannot depict too strongly the sense of relief, a feeling unequalled since the Armistice of 1918, which most of us shared, on hearing the news that came late on a memorable September night from Munich. It was a profound relief first of all to know that agreement had been reached by the heads of the four great Powers on the method of the transference of the Sudetens to Germany. There was amazing hope, too, for the future. It was almost unbelievable that an undertaking should have been signed by Hitler, along with Chamberlain, to adopt the method of consultation in dealing with any future questions that might concern their two countries. The rejoicing at his achievement, on his return home, was unbounded. He was greeted with enthusiastic cheering everywhere, and not least warmly in the House of Commons.

Many M.P.s—I should think indeed the great majority—readily and gratefully accepted the Prime Minister's belief, expressed in a moment of emotion, that it was "Peace for our time." Some from the first were sceptical. A few were scornful.

Amid the numerous, warm congratulations to Chamberlain hostile comment and even a sense of humiliation crept into Parliament. He was denounced for betrayal of the Czechs, whose country was mutilated. In his defence emphasis was laid on his having been convinced at Berchtesgaden that Hitler would risk a world war rather than give way. We were not ready in the Air and it was known that France was still less fit to carry out her obligations. Chamberlain had at any rate secured time for us to prepare. With that relief, although it was tempered by the knowledge that Germany also would be increasing her munitions, the overwhelming mass of the Government's supporters were for the time well pleased. On the other hand, critics lamented that Hitler had won another victory for aggression, and added to his prestige.

Members of various sections joined in lament and protest. Duff Cooper resigned office. Attlee declared that Munich was one of the greatest diplomatic defeats Great Britain and France had ever suffered. It was, Churchill said, a disaster of the first magnitude for the two countries.

With characteristic prescience Churchill foretold the consequences. All the countries of Central and Eastern Europe would make the best terms they could with the triumphant Nazi Power. The road down the Danube Valley to the Black Sea had been opened. All the countries of Middle Europe, all the Danubian countries one after another would be drawn into the system of power politics radiating from Berlin.

I noted a gradual, though reluctant and slow, movement of opinion towards Churchill's view. Relief at the immediate escape from war was followed in critical minds by foreboding.

Parliament welcomed the fresh assurance that our dangerously delayed rearmament was growing in pace and volume. The limit of borrowing for Defence was raised from 400 to 800 millions. The House of Commons was insistent in anxious enquiries about the Air Force. It showed daily concern about air-raid precautions, and Sir John Anderson, a first-rate administrator, was brought into the Government to supervise them.

For some time longer the Government's faithful supporters approved of, or acquiesced in, the "appeasement" policy. In spite of discouragement from Nazi aggressive propaganda and persecution of the Jews, Chamberlain cherished hope of a better era in Anglo-German relations. He continued also to try to restore friendliness with Italy. There was an outburst of criticism on his visit with Lord Halifax to Rome. The Anglo-Italian agreement had been ratified and Chamberlain received a cordial welcome from the Italian crowd as he had received from the German crowd—but as he soon sadly learned the ambitions of the Fascists were no more satisfied than those of the Nazis.

Hope of the settlement of Europe disappeared in March, 1939, when Hitler, breaking his promise, engulfed the whole of Czecho-Slovakia in the Nazi régime. Some uneasiness was caused in Parliament by the restrained tone of Chamberlain's comment on this new act of aggression. Distrustful members feared that he was still reluctant to adopt a resolute attitude. Many who had encouraged him in his policy turned on him now that it had failed.

They were relieved by the speech he delivered immediately in Birmingham. There he denounced Hitler's breach of faith in the strongest language and warned the aggressor, as his brother had done a few years previously, that we would resist any attempt to dominate Europe.

The temper of this speech was in accord with the new temper of Parliament. It meant good-bye to Munich.

Decisions were taken by Government and Parliament committing us if necessary to force. These became urgently expedient when the Germans not only seized and made arbitrary demands on Rumania but also menaced Poland.

"Grave and determined," was my diary note on the House of Commons when the most momentous decision taken since the First Great War was announced by the Prime Minister. The House, although conscious of its gravity, approved of the declaration that in the event of action which threatened the independence of Poland and was resisted by her Government we would give her all the support in our power. Parties hitherto divided were united in a common responsibility.

The Prime Minister went to Aberdeenshire to fish at Easter. The startling news followed him on Good Friday, of the Italian invasion of Albania. Ministers within reach were instantly summoned by Lord Halifax, and Chamberlain presided on Easter Monday at the first Cabinet held since the former War on a Bank Holiday.

Parliament, with its recess cut short, was informed of new commitments by the British and French Governments. Guarantees of support, similar to that in the case of Poland, were extended to Greece and Rumania. Arrangements for mutual aid, which eventually took the form of a Treaty, were entered into with Turkey.

We endeavoured to build up a Peace Front, such as Churchill advocated in 1936, on the principle "who touches one, touches all." And at last the Prime Minister decided to form the Ministry of Supply for which Churchill had so long pleaded.

Compulsory military service in the previous War was adopted only after some months of Ministerial crises and Parliamentary controversy. Now there was no such impediment to its introduction. The Prime Minister was attacked by the Opposition for violation of the pledge that compulsion would not be introduced in peace time but this was no peace time in the true sense, and although the critics tried to score against Chamberlain they were as ready as any party to fulfil international obligations.

One of the most interesting debates that I heard in summer was on the Peace Front. Negotiations with Russia were reported to be at a critical stage. Large sections of the House were anxious that we should lose no more time in getting an agreement. Churchill did not understand what we had been boggling at. It was argued that the inclusion of Russia in the Peace Front might turn the balance against War. Lloyd George estimated the chances of the outbreak of war, without Russia on our side, at 50-50; if we came to terms with her he put the chances against war at 10 to one.

A member of the Government said to me "We don't know what Russia wants; we don't know what she would do or could do." That was a confession of incompetent diplomacy.

Some of the Ministers were suspected of being influenced, as undoubtedly the Right Wing of their followers were, by prejudice against the Soviet. The Prime Minister himself was more statesmanlike, and I am sure he was sincere in his desire for an agreement although he did not always appear to be enthusiastic about it. On one occasion when he mentioned countries which might join the Peace Front a member exclaimed "And Russia." "Yes, and Russia," Chamberlain assented in his dry matter-of-fact tone. I looked across at Maisky, the Russian Ambassador, who was leaning forward with chin propped on the rail of the Diplomatic Gallery, and I wondered what impression of that incident he might convey to Moscow.

I was told that Maisky at that critical time beseeched Lord Halifax to go personally to Moscow. Stalin distrusted British policy and suspected that the Government was still trying to come to terms with Hitler. Maisky hoped that that suspicion would be removed, but no emissary of the highest rank was sent.

I noted in the House when danger was drawing nearer a greater friendliness for Churchill. Till this time there had been little evidence of a desire in the ranks of the Government's followers, except in a few quarters, to see him in office. Now

I detected a change in the atmosphere. The Treasury Bench was still frigid but elsewhere the House was amiable. The admission to the Cabinet of the man whose prescience had been proved was called for, especially by the younger Conservatives and the Opposition parties. It appears that among the Conservatives in high place who would have liked to see him in office was the Marquis of Londonderry, who had been a zealous Air Minister.

When Parliament adjourned for the summer recess members, in view of the menace to Poland, feared that they might not have a long holiday. They shared the tension which darkened life in many countries.

“Truly the souls of men are full of dread;  
Ye cannot reason almost with a man  
That looks not heavily and full of fear.”

The Prime Minister, on whose motion the House adjourned for two months, went again to fish in the north of Scotland. He needed recreation, and by taking it he gave hope to others. He would not go away if he believed war was imminent. But again he was hurried back.

The Non-aggression Pact by Germany and Russia was a painful surprise. It was specially hard for the friends of the Soviet to realize that Stalin had been secretly coming to terms with Hitler while we were building hope on our negotiations at Moscow; and everybody was amazed that the arch-enemy of Bolshevism should have become Stalin's ally. If Hitler assumed that the Pact would compel us to abandon our obligations to Poland he showed his ignorance.<sup>1</sup>

It was often confidently asserted that if the Government had made its position clear in 1914 the first Great War might have been averted. That assertion was disputed by Asquith. In his volume *The Genesis of the War*, in which, by the way, he acknowledged my service in disentangling the story of the negotiations, he wrote that no evidence of any value had been, or could be, adduced to prove that a threatening or even an uncompromising attitude on our part would have turned Germany and Austria from the path on which they had entered.

Whatever may have been the case in 1914 there was no possibility of our position being misunderstood in 1939. As Chamberlain stated, the Government could not have done more to keep open the way for an equitable settlement of the dispute between Germany and Poland. Nor had it neglected any means of making crystal clear that if the German Government insisted again on using force we were resolved to oppose it by force.

<sup>1</sup> Hitler made a fatal mistake two years later when he turned on Russia.

## CHAPTER XXVII

### THE LIGHTS ALL OUT AGAIN

*The German Challenge—Voice of the Nation—A Pathetic Confession—Churchill on Treasury Bench—Shocks and Disappointments—Norway—Parliamentary Recit—“In God’s Name, Go”—Lloyd George’s Attack—Chamberlain Overthrown*

(Although I gave up regular work in 1938, I went often afterwards to the Press Gallery. I saw the passing of Parliament from Peace to War conditions; I heard momentous debates, and witnessed scenes recorded in the pages of History, and kept in touch with friends in all parties. I was able to keep up my Parliamentary diary by personal observation till Churchill held the reins with his strong, confident hands. I am pleased that I can continue my story till that vital epoch.)

FOR THE SECOND TIME I WATCHED PARLIAMENT TAKING UP A GERMAN CHALLENGE. I shuddered at the convulsion which I foresaw again in our national and everyday life. The gravity and anxiety of the House of Commons when it was hurriedly summoned from its recess in August and passed the Emergency Powers Bill at a single sitting reminded me of the eve of the first Great War.

I was still more poignantly reminded of those fateful days by the aspect of the House on the first of September when Germany began her brutal attack on Poland. There was the same extreme tension as in 1914, when Sir Edward Grey’s famous speech determined the course of Parliament and the Nation. Now in 1939 everyone knew there was only one course for the Government and waited for it with stiff lip.

There was an encouraging political difference between the two occasions. In 1914 the Labour Party was divided, and although the majority of its members were for war the leader of the party attacked the Government policy. Now the House was practically unanimous. No one spoke more resolutely for taking up arms than Arthur Greenwood on behalf of the Labour Party. Greenwood who, during Attlee’s illness, displayed the qualities of a great leader in the emergency meetings of Parliament, was cheered enthusiastically as a true spokesman of the nation in his determined, uncompromising, fearless resistance to aggression. Sir Archibald Sinclair, the eloquent Liberal leader, was equally resolute and forceful.

Sunday the 3rd of September, when War was declared, was the first Sunday on which Parliament met since the Reform Bill crisis in 1831. Members were bewildered and disquieted on the previous day by the Prime Minister not then making the declaration. Men with little faith in his leadership feared hesitation or vacillation at the last hour. The explanation was that the Government was waiting for France to keep step with us in the ultimatum to Germany. The French declaration of war was six hours behind ours.

G. M. Trevelyan in *Grey of Fallooden* has described how, on the night of August 3, 1914, as the lamps were being lit in the summer dusk, Sir Edward Grey, standing in the windows of his room in the Foreign Office, overlooking St. James’s

Park, said to a friend "The lamps are going out all over Europe." Now the lamps were going out again; they were going out all over the world.

Sympathy was felt by the House of Commons with Chamberlain in his emotion at the failure of his long struggle for Peace. I do not know that any Prime Minister ever made such a sorrowful confession as he made:

"Everything that I have worked for, everything that I have hoped for, everything that I have believed in during my public life has crashed into ruins."

Even critics who thought that he was himself partly to blame for the crash looked at him with softened feelings.

I was interested in comparing the steps now taken with those taken in the former war. The War Cabinet of nine members, as the Supreme Executive Authority, which Chamberlain formed, was in its main idea on the lines laid down by Lloyd George in 1916, but was larger than he considered expedient. Advocates of a small Cabinet for war purposes, contended that it should be composed solely or mainly of Ministers free from departmental work but Chamberlain did not believe that such a system would save time or lead to quicker decisions.

Churchill's inclusion in the new Cabinet was its most spectacular and popular feature. Former detractors thoroughly approved of his appointment to office now that the emergency of which he warned them had come; and it was considered specially appropriate that he should return to the position at the Admiralty from which he was ejected in 1915.

I was greatly interested when I saw Churchill on the Treasury bench for the first time since he left it with the Baldwin Government in 1929. His presence there more than anything else gave me confidence in the Cabinet.

Eden's recall to office—as Minister for Dominion Affairs—also was significant. His distrust of appeasement had been justified in the sight even of men who at the time of his resignation thought it was uncalled for.

The leaders of the Opposition parties declined office under a Prime Minister in whom they had no confidence. They were reproached by supporters of the Government for their aloofness in a national crisis, but in their independent position they tried to quicken war activities and strengthen the organisation of the home services.

Criticism with these objects came not only from Socialists and Liberals but from other quarters of the House. No Parliamentary intrigues like those in 1914-16 were visible to an observer like myself, and though one or two Ministers with whom I talked saw partisan feeling in some of the criticism I think it was on the whole suggestive and constructive.

Gradually criticism from both sides became sharper. Our supremacy on the sea, our blockade of the enemy and our economic resources were cited in Ministerial speeches during the "phoney war" period as assurances of ultimate victory. But meantime while wishful thinkers waited for the Germans to knock their heads

against the Maginot Line, we suffered a series of shocks and disappointments besides the sense of frustration felt by Parliament at our inability to help Poland or to save the Finns.

I saw signs of dangerous restiveness in the House of Commons early in 1940. Brilliant feats were performed by the Navy and the R.A.F., but there were complaints against several Ministers; there was a growing feeling that all was not done which might have been done and that the Government wanted more decision, direction and force. Chamberlain said Hitler had "missed the bus" by not attacking the Allies when they were at their weakest, but complacency was soon disturbed by the invasion of Denmark and Norway. Why, it was asked, did we not detect and arrest the crossing of the Germans to Norway, where they established themselves with the connivance of Quisling. In the Lobby I heard members trying to comfort each other with the reflection that Hitler's invasion of Scandinavia might prove as great an error as Napoleon's invasion of Spain. That comforting analogy was knocked to the ground by the collapse of our assistance.

A profound shock was given to the House by the Prime Minister's announcement of the withdrawal of our Forces from Southern Norway. This was a crushing disappointment after great expectations had been raised. The patience and pride of Parliament were tried beyond endurance by the new humiliation, the loss of prestige and the discouragement of friends.

Feeling boiled over in May. All parties attacked the Government and especially the Prime Minister. There was a determined demand for bolder leadership. Confidence in Chamberlain's conduct of the war was destroyed—even to a large extent, on his own side of the House. Two former colleagues took conspicuous parts in the revolt against him.

I have witnessed few scenes so dramatic and emotional as that when straight-hitting Amery cried "In God's name, Go!" to the Chamberlain Government, as Cromwell cried to the Long Parliament when he thought it no longer fit to conduct the affairs of the nation. That was an abrupt, harsh order of dismissal, particularly harsh from an old colleague, but it conveyed the predominant feeling of the dissatisfied, apprehensive House. Chamberlain, no mean tactician, realized the danger, and on a division being demanded by the Labour leaders he jumped up and appealed to his friends. "I have friends," he said in a proud challenging tone.

A knock-out blow at Chamberlain was struck by Lloyd George. There had scarcely ever been sympathy between the two men, whose temperaments and political aims were dissimilar. The veteran made an impassioned attack on the Government and declared there was nothing which could contribute more to victory than that the Prime Minister should sacrifice the seals of office. On many an occasion an attack by Lloyd George on a political opponent operated to the benefit of the opponent, but this was an occasion where other motives came into play.

Many of Chamberlain's political friends held with Duff Cooper that they must throw away all respect for friendships, party loyalties and personal affection. The result was that the Government majority on what was practically a vote of censure fell ominously from 200 to 81. Chamberlain walked out, with the pathetic look of a surprised and sorely stricken man.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

### THE NATIONAL LEADER

*New War Cabinet—The Coalition—Leader of Opposition—Strange Spectacle—“Blood, Toil, Tears and Sweat”—If Necessary Alone—Inspiring Speeches—Secret Sessions—Chamberlain retires and dies—New Conservative Leader—Frequent Government Changes—Eden’s Return to Foreign Office—The Wheel Comes Full Circle.*

THE RECONSTRUCTION OF THE GOVERNMENT UNDER A NEW HEAD WAS INEVITABLE. An all-party Government was required and as the Socialists and Opposition Liberals persisted in their refusal to serve under Chamberlain he resigned.

The choice of Churchill as Prime Minister excited scarcely any surprise. So far as I gathered, members, as a rule, were relieved and gratified by the announcement. They agreed with Lloyd George in thinking that the Sovereign exercised a wise choice. The qualifications of Lord Halifax were canvassed by some people but a Peer was then impossible and I have no doubt that Lord Halifax himself shared the general approval of Churchill’s appointment. A born man of war with daring, courage and resource, Churchill had in peace time proved his prescience and in the Chamberlain Government had strengthened his hold on Parliament by his robust defiance of the Nazis and his vigorous administration at the Admiralty.

The ex-Prime Minister in consenting to serve under his successor and former lieutenant took a course which Asquith on being deposed refused to take. Chamberlain had no cause for personal resentment. Churchill had, indeed, stood by him when he was attacked. His overthrow was directly due to the House of Commons.

The broad-based Government, wanted by Parliament, was formed in a single day. The leaders of the Labour and Liberal Parties immediately and whole-heartedly agreed to take office under Churchill.

Here was one of the most astounding events in our history. The man who for many years was a political outcast became supreme in Parliament and the nation, and received more confidence and support than Asquith or Lloyd George in the first Great War.

In the new War Cabinet Churchill’s colleagues were equally divided between Labour and Conservative. Attlee and Greenwood were clearly pointed out as the trusted representatives of Labour. It was equally obvious that the Conservatives should be Chamberlain, who became the new Lord President of the Council, and Lord Halifax, who retained the Foreign Office. I heard that Chamberlain wanted an additional party colleague in the Cabinet, but if he did so he was disappointed.

I thought that the Prime Minister showed true political instinct in appointing Attlee, the Socialist leader, as Deputy-Leader of the House of Commons.

Outside the War Cabinet the Service Ministers were drawn from the three parties. The Liberal leader, Sir Archibald Sinclair, received the vitally important post of Air Minister; Alexander became First Lord of the Admiralty, the

position that he occupied in the Labour Government with, as Churchill testified, a very considerable measure of naval esteem; Eden went to the War Office in place of Oliver Stanley who in January had succeeded Hore-Belisha.

A popular appeal was made by the appointment to important domestic office of Herbert Morrison and Ernest Bevin, two men of push-and-go who had the confidence of the Labour Party throughout the country. Bevin was now to enter Parliament. Dalton, who in denunciation of peace-time Governments banged the box on the table louder even than Gladstone, also was entrusted with high office.

Great expectations were raised (and realized) by the appointment of forceful Lord Beaverbrook—"The Beaver" in the familiar talk of the Lobby—as Minister of Aircraft Production; and confidence was maintained in Lord Woolton (formerly Sir Frederick Marquis) as Minister of Food, the post in which he had been placed by Chamberlain and for which he was specially qualified by his business experience. Amery, Lord Lloyd (he died early in 1941), and Duff Cooper, conspicuous war stalwarts, got important places.

Members of Chamberlain's Government who were severe critics of Churchill in peace-time accepted office under him. Like the Conservatives in the first Great War who disliked the idea of Lloyd George becoming Prime Minister but who served under him when he attained that position, they were influenced by a sense of public duty.

The two statesmen who had been Chamberlain's principal lieutenants in the House of Commons and had been regarded as potential Prime Ministers moved to new high positions. Sir John Simon received the office of Lord Chancellor for which he was so eminently fitted but which he declined in 1915; and Sir Samuel Hoare undertook delicate duty as Ambassador at Madrid.

There was surprise at Sir Kingsley Wood's appointment as Chancellor of the Exchequer. Unfriendly gossips suggested that it was a mere sop to the Conservative Party but the Prime Minister was no slave to party, whereas he could appreciate the administrative and Parliamentary qualities which Sir Kingsley had shown in other Departments. I thought Sir Kingsley was one of the ablest men on the Treasury bench; certainly he had one of the finest heads; and he turned away wrath with a smooth answer or a joke.

Early proof of his talents was given by Sir Kingsley at the Post Office. I was interested to hear from him that his wife was a distant connection of Henry Fawcett, the blind Postmaster-General in Gladstone's second Government. Fawcett lived at Vauxhall and I used to see him, with his private secretary, walking home late at night by the south side of the Thames.

Viscount Caldecote, so well known in Parliament as Sir Thomas Inskip, ended his political career by his appointment as Lord Chief Justice. Some of the men of great expectations were left out of Government office but Robert Hudson, who had been long kept in secondary rôles, was promoted to the Ministry of Agriculture and in that difficult position won distinction and success. Harold Macmillan, noted for his constructive criticism in the Baldwin-Chamberlain régime, began now an interesting official career; and everyone was pleased at the success of Lloyd George's son, Major Gwilym.

Who was to be the Leader of the Opposition when the Labour and Liberal parties were united with the Conservatives in office? The occupant of this traditional position was, by the Act of 1937, entitled to a salary of £2,000. To whom should

the money go? There were grave shakings of the head and many jokes on the question. As the Independent Labour Group of three, led by Maxton, was the only party in Opposition, an unforeseen problem confronted the House. In the circumstances the salary was suspended. The ceremonial functions of Leader of the Opposition, in putting questions and commenting on business, were performed in non-belligerent tone by an experienced member of the Labour Party.

Looking down on the Treasury bench, I saw Chamberlain and Captain Margesson, the Chief Whip, on the Prime Minister's right hand and Attlee and Greenwood on his left. Churchill and Attlee sitting together presented as strange a spectacle as did Asquith and Bonar Law side by side in 1915, or MacDonald and Baldwin in 1931. In the other House, Lord Snell, the son of an agricultural labourer and leader of the Socialist Peers who had won the respect of all parties, sat by the side of Conservative Ministers, as deputy-leader of the Lords, with the position of Captain of the Gentlemen-at-Arms.

The Government not only secured the confidence of Parliament more fully than any Government in the first Great War but also secured unprecedented powers. A Bill giving it in effect complete power over everybody and everything passed both Houses at a single sitting. The Socialist leader had charge of the totalitarian measure in the Commons.

Churchill became the national leader in the highest sense, a leader worthy of the fame of Pitt. He became the symbol of the nation's will and courage. All classes rallied readily to his banner. While he infused new energy into the conduct of the war his speeches, bold and brilliant, thrilled Parliament and the country and Commonwealth. He never concealed or minimized dangers or difficulties but inspired every listener and reader to face peril with fortitude.

"I have nothing to offer but blood, toil, tears and sweat." That was what the new Prime Minister told the House of Commons as he had told those who joined the Government. "But," he said, "I take up my task with buoyancy and hope. I feel sure that our cause will not be suffered to fail among men."

Calls were at once made on our courage and faith when the Germans broke through the French defences and swept over Holland and Belgium, and when, after King Leopold surrendered the Belgian Army, the British Expeditionary Force which had been sent to his assistance in response to his eleventh-hour appeal, was placed in extreme jeopardy.

I counted eighteen foreign diplomats in the Gallery of the House of Commons when Churchill in one of the most impressive of his orations told the story of the evacuation from Dunkirk. The House was packed and there was such a muster of Peers that many stood at the top of the staircase, looking over each other's shoulders. Everyone was breathlessly eager to hear the sequel to what Churchill described as a major military disaster. I was more excited than ever I was before in my life, as I waited for and listened to his speech.

High resolve and unyielding will were declared by Churchill in a passage destined to a place in every history book:—

"We shall not flag or fail. We shall go on to the end. . . . We shall defend our island whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills."

That heroic declaration was cheered enthusiastically by the House. If there had been fears or doubts these were ended.

There was an arresting phrase in the speech which was variously interpreted. Churchill was confident of what we should do "if necessary alone." What did the words mean?

Coming from the Gallery I discussed them with a friend. Were they a rhetorical flourish? Or was there the possibility of our being deserted by our Ally?

The words proved ominous and prophetic. A fortnight later came the dreadful news of the fall of France. Although Churchill in order to avert that calamity offered France full partnership with Great Britain, Paul Reynaud, her courageous Prime Minister, was overthrown by defeatists, faint-hearts and intriguers in his Cabinet at Bordeaux and a Government in favour of an Armistice was formed by Pétain.

Parliament, like every section of the community, was stunned when the veteran Marshal announced that France must cease fighting and approached Hitler for "an honourable peace." It was almost unbelievable but 'twas true. With grief at the military collapse and moral decline of France, we saw "power dropping from the hand of paralytic factions, and no soul to snatch and wield it."

The British Commonwealth was left to fight alone. Foreign observers, and among them French, believed we would be subdued in a few weeks. We did not quail or hesitate.

On the day following the tragic news from across the Channel I sat in the Press Gallery. I was proud to witness the inspiring scene. Churchill received an encouraging, trusting welcome from the House and gratified it by the unflinching tone of his speech. In a memorable sentence of an eloquent peroration he spoke of the approaching Battle of Britain and said:

"Let us brace ourselves to our duty and so bear ourselves that if the British Commonwealth and Empire last for a thousand years men will still say 'This was their finest hour.' "

Contempt, rather than fear, prevailed when Italy took the opportunity of the French collapse to throw off her non-belligerent cloak and enter the war on the side of Germany, stabbing France in the back and hoping to make herself Mistress of the Mediterranean.

But what about the powerful French Fleet? Members of Parliament anxiously put the question to one another day after day. When the French Ministers begged to be released from the obligation not to enter on separate negotiations the British Government undertook to give that release provided the French Fleet was despatched to British ports. As that condition was not complied with steps were taken to avert as far as possible the danger of the Fleet passing under German and Italian control. After an honourable alternative had been rejected by the French Admiral a British Battle Squadron disabled French ships of war at Oran. For that action the Pétain Government, settled at Vichy, broke off diplomatic relations with this country.

In one of his most thrilling, inspiring orations Churchill vindicated what we did at Oran "with aching hearts but with clear vision." Again he sounded the rallying note. "In the fullest harmony with our Dominions," as he said, "we are moving through a period of extreme danger and of splendid hope when every virtue of our race will be tested, and all that we have and are will be freely staked."

The acclamations at the close of his speech showed how the House responded to his appeal. Members stood up and waved their Order Papers, and prolonged cheers came from every quarter.

I was struck by the demeanour of the House when Sir Kingsley Wood, who won confidence as Chancellor of the Exchequer, submitted the third War Budget.<sup>1</sup> There was none of the customary excitement of Budget day. Instead of gasping at the terrific expenditure and taxation, members listened in silent acquiescence, as if indifferent.

In Palace Yard I met an experienced Conservative and commented to him on the apparent apathy. "Money doesn't count," he truly said. I knew that was so, but was impressed by its recognition by one who saw his world of ease and plenty falling into ruins.

Transactions with the United States under which their affairs and ours would be mixed up together, for the benefit of both, were readily and gladly encouraged by Churchill. Of this process he exclaimed:

"Like the Mississippi it just keeps rolling along. Let it roll. Let it roll on, full flood, inexorable, irresistible, benignant, to broader lands and better days."

I give these quotations, with only such context as is necessary to indicate how Parliament and with it the country was upheld in disappointment, anxiety and peril. Nearly all the speeches that I quote I heard from Churchill's own lips. The orator was not only eloquent and impressive in language, but was also animated in gesture. With head thrust forward in familiar attitude, there was the expressive play of the hands, there was the admonitory finger or clenched fist and in emphasis there was the downward thrust of the arms.

I never saw him happier and more exultant than when, in a year's survey of the war in August, he celebrated the victory of the Royal Air Force over the Germans in their mass assaults on our shores in daylight—the first phase of the Battle of Britain. In a voice of deep feeling he expressed the gratitude which everywhere "except in the abodes of the guilty" went out to the British airmen who, undaunted by odds, were turning the tide of the world war by their prowess and their devotion.

If any sentence lives in history it will be the sentence in which Churchill, compressing the greatest amount of meaning into the smallest number of words, acknowledged the debt of millions to the airmen. It is a sentence, in its simplicity, worthy of John Bright:—

**"Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many to so few."**

Secret sessions were frequently held, not because of domestic troubles, but because it was desirable to give Parliament confidential information on war preparations. "I spy strangers" was an old formula. It caused obstruction or annoyance last century when it was automatically followed by the closing of the galleries. That practice proved intolerable in 1875 when the Prince of Wales sat over the clock listening to Henry Chaplin on the breeding of horses and Joseph Biggar mischievously espied strangers, with the result that the Prince had to withdraw. A new system was

<sup>1</sup> Sir Kingsley Wood died in 1943.

introduced under which, on notice being taken of the presence of strangers, a motion for their withdrawal was put to the House. Asquith resorted to Secret Sessions only twice; he considered them a questionable expedient, but in Lloyd George's time in 1917-18 there were five. They became familiar in 1940, and in later years.

Chamberlain's retirement in October brought a long official career to a sudden end. He had undergone a grave abdominal operation, and although he recovered sufficiently to resume his work he was unable to continue it. Some people had unkindly called for his retirement because they distrusted him on account of his peace-time policy, but the Prime Minister testified to the value of his services. "You did all you could for peace," Churchill wrote; "you did all you could for victory." He could not have sought a better epitaph. He refused titular honour; like his father, he remained plain Mr. Chamberlain.

There was a national note of sadness at his death a few weeks later. His fellow-countrymen honoured him for his long, untiring, disinterested devotion to their service and lamented that he did not live to see the victory of which he was certain. His ashes were buried in Westminster Abbey, beside Bonar Law's grave. These two were the only Prime Ministers buried there since Gladstone's body was laid in the Abbey.

Churchill's election as leader of the Conservative Party, in succession to Chamberlain, was one of the most extraordinary events in the amazing career, which I had followed from its start. For nearly the whole of his public life his attaining of that position was inconceivable and even now, I gathered from rumour, a set of the older, stiff-necked Conservatives were reluctant to give the supreme and permanent command of their party to a man who left it and served in Liberal Governments. Other critics argued that a party leadership might detract from his authority as national leader, but it can be said of Churchill, as I have said of Joseph Chamberlain and Lloyd George, that he was not a party man in the narrow, exclusive sense. Anyhow, he continued to receive the unbounded confidence of Parliament and the affection of the country.

It was difficult to keep up with the changes in the Government: they were so frequent. Several Ministers, although holding departmental office, were added to the War Cabinet and Sir John Anderson got Chamberlain's place in it as Lord President of the Council.<sup>1</sup> A practice adopted in the previous war was followed by the giving of office in the Government and seats in Parliament to men who had distinguished themselves in other spheres. Sir John Reith (now Lord Reith) of B.B.C. fame, and Sir Andrew Duncan, a man of high business reputation, who had been brought in by Chamberlain, received office also in Churchill's Government, and new blood was taken from the City by Oliver Lyttelton, son of the Alfred Lyttelton on whom Asquith pronounced an eloquent eulogy.

The most important change was in the position of Viscount Halifax. On the Marquis of Lothian's sudden death, when contact with America by a distinguished statesman was vitally essential, Viscount Halifax—"seconded" from the War Cabinet—was appointed Ambassador at Washington.

There was no question as to his successor at the Foreign Office. "Of course, it will be Anthony Eden," everybody said. With Eden's return to the Foreign Office, which he left three years previously, the wheel had come full circle. His

<sup>1</sup> Sir John Anderson became Chancellor of the Exchequer in 1943.

appointment, with a seat in the War Cabinet, to his former high post at a most critical period marked him out more distinctly than before as a potential Prime Minister.

No political seer in my Victorian days could have foreseen a Prime Minister requiring to call for such fortitude from the nation as Churchill called for in October, 1940, when he declared "Long, dark months of trials and tribulations lie before us . . . death and sorrow will be the companions of our journey; hardship our garment; constancy and valour our only shield." All these trials and tribulations the British people were exhorted and encouraged by their leader to bear. "Our qualities and deeds," he said, "must burn and glow through the gloom of Europe until they become the veritable beacon of its salvation." History shows how that vision was realized.

I rejoiced at the opening of my career as a Parliamentary journalist to see and hear Gladstone; I have rejoiced in old age to witness Winston Churchill adding his name to the roll of the immortals.

## CHAPTER XXIX

### TIMES MARCHES ON

*Press Gallery changes—The Doyen—How we went home—A Bath Room—From ponies to telephones—The Descriptive Eye—The Lobbyist—Attitude of Statesmen—Scope for Scoops—My Sixtieth Budget.*

WHEN I RETIRED FROM REGULAR WORK IN 1938 I WAS THE ANTIQUE DOYEN OF THE Parliamentary journalists. "Mac!" my Press Gallery colleagues would call out to me when Edward VIII left the Throne, "tell us how this compares with James II's abdication!" It was familiar banter that I should be asked "What did Gladstone say?" For forty years, from 1881, I represented the *Aberdeen Free Press*, and after a year on the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, I became Parliamentary correspondent of the *Liverpool Daily Post*. For some forty years without a break I wrote the Parliamentary letter for the *British Weekly*.

Gallery life changed as greatly as anything else. Long ago when the House of Commons sat very late there were no all-night trams or trains, and groups of journalists going the same way home would share a four-wheeler or take the first morning train from Victoria (about 4 o'clock). Or walk miles home.

Scanty provision was made in my early years for the comfort of the Press Gallery men, scarcely any for their recreation. Food could be had only in a small tea-and-reading room and at a bar where we got a slice of cold beef. Successive generations enjoyed growing facilities until eventually with a score of rooms we reached the comforts and conveniences of a well-equipped club. The time came when we were able to have a bath.

Another relief. Announciators in our writing-room saved sketch-writers from constant attendance in the Gallery. We could miss the dull men and go in again when the annunciator said that somebody interesting was "up." Telephones took

the place of the boys on ponies or bicycles who used to speed the news to Fleet Street, and from my own special telephone box I could speak to my head office. Typewriters invaded the rooms after the first German War.

Parliamentary reporting has changed a lot in my time. Early this century, a Cabinet Minister, a distinguished Liberal, said to me with ill-concealed petulance that it was the duty of the Press to report the speeches, not to comment on the manners and idiosyncrasies of the members. Old-fashioned reporters regarded the strictly accurate transcript as their whole duty. I asked one why he did not insert the name of the "honourable gentleman" to whom Gladstone had referred in a scathing passage? The report left the reader in doubt of the gentleman's identity. "It is not my duty," observed the old-fashioned reporter, "to add to Gladstone's words."

Since that time—when long columns of speeches were unrelieved by as much as a sub-heading—the seeing eye has played a larger part along with the hearing ear, and the descriptive pen has come largely into vogue. Summaries are freer in style and the Parliamentary sketch as a rule is more given to high lights and personal touches. The most remarkable new development is the sketch-report which sometimes supplements the ordinary report, sometimes takes its place. In its own way it can adequately draw public attention to Parliament, though straight reporting of Parliamentary speeches should not be allowed to die out. Modern M.P.s are by no means generally displeased by picturesque references to themselves in the up-to-date style of journalism. But the M.P. has not been born who is not mighty proud to read a substantial straight report of what he was saying.

Political correspondents, especially those with the entrée to the Lobby, a privilege I enjoyed for fifty years, have better facilities now for obtaining authoritative information. The value of their liaison work as between Government and public is more frankly appreciated and is well understood by the leading statesmen.

I have seen an immense development of the system of Public Relations and Press Officers, while contact with the Lobby has been long maintained through the Chief Press Liaison Officer at No. 10, Downing Street, a service discreetly performed by George Steward, C.V.O., who accompanied the King and Queen to Canada and the United States. Most valuable of all the privileges in my later years were the occasional informative conferences with Ministers themselves, even with the highest. What was said was sometimes "off the record"<sup>1</sup> or for background use only. What is confidential is never betrayed. Our journalism continues through all its changes of form and fashion to set the highest possible standard in that respect. It is a standard upon which our public men know that they can rely without question. The day of the "scoop" is not gone. There is still scope for it by the individual journalist.

Silence is enjoined upon the Gallery in the interests of the men there themselves as well as the orators downstairs. I was in the French Chamber during an exceedingly stormy scene when frenzied comment passed between deputy and journalist. Such irregularity was inconceivable at Westminster. Even when an M.P. came up to the side of the Gallery to speak to a reporter the conversation was carried on in a whisper. But we did not live under a system of tyranny. It is true that when I entered the Gallery we received little consideration from the Authorities. But gradually we received more and more the rights of self-government, until we enjoyed

<sup>1</sup> This phrase suggested to Margot, Countess of Oxford and Asquith, the title for one of her books.

a sort of Home-rule under the Speaker and the Serjeant-at-Arms. The consideration we enjoyed ultimately from them and the First Commissioner of Works I acknowledged as Chairman of the Committee when Baldwin came upstairs to unveil a panel in our Library.

I received the honour of Knighthood in 1932 after my half-century of Parliamentary journalism. I was gratified on my retirement six years later by gifts from colleagues in and out of Parliament and from M.P.s with whom I had been specially associated. From the Gallery Committee I received a Memorial, framed in Westminster Palace oak, extolling the assistance I had given by my services and "high standard of professional conduct" to the development of the Parliamentary Press Gallery into an essential and respected part of British democratic machinery.

A word more—on my record of Budgets. My second broadcast on changes in Parliament was given at the opening of the Budget in 1940. That was the sixtieth annual financial statement I had heard, besides many supplementary Budgets, and I lived to hear several more. I don't think anybody else has an equal record.

## CHAPTER XXX

### CHANGES IN PARLIAMENT

*Hat and Coat—Gladstone's borrowed hat—Women Members—What about Manners?—Friendship of Opponents—Altercations—Best Mixed Club—Beards—Hours—Divisions—The Heavy Burden—The Question Hour—More Talk, Less Eloquence—The Pompous Orator—“Translate”—Quotations—Phrases—Mixed Metaphors—Throat Lubricants—House of Lords—Statesmen, Old and New.*

"WHO GOES HOME?" THE TIME IS ARRIVING FOR ME TO FINISH MY NOTES AND GO FOR my hat. It is no longer the silk hat without which I could not have ventured to attend my Parliamentary duties in times long past. The sartorial appearance of the House of Commons has changed completely since I first looked down on rows of black coats and top hats. Till Queen Victoria's death, that watershed event, the conventional costume and the tall hat were worn in the House by almost all members and in the Lobby by everyone except the Whips. The lounge suit first crept on to the back benches, then gradually made its way to the Treasury bench where Asquith took to it, and also Balfour at the end of his career. Had the jacket delayed a few years longer I do not know in what pockets Baldwin would have stowed his pipes.

The hat has played a conspicuous part in the Parliamentary scene. Lord Hugh Cecil once reminded members that the custom of keeping covered, which used to be so prevalent, was a symbol that the Commons were part of the sovereign authority of the realm. A member who raises a point of order after a division has been called is required to do so seated and covered. The rightful hat has not always been at hand. Gladstone seldom wore a hat except when he looked in on a visit. Once a gleeful House saw the G.O.M.'s great dome momentarily and shakily adorned by a borrowed hat several sizes too small. When no hat has been available, I have seen

a member hold his order paper on his head, thus covering himself according to the letter of the law. Seats, now reserved by a card, used to be secured by a hat, and before the House met the benches looked like hatters' shelves.

Some speakers used the crown of their tall hat for their MSS. John Bright's notes, made on small square cards, were dropped into his hat one by one as he spoke. The hat, however, had its risks. Members laughed like schoolboys when they saw an orator after an eloquent peroration sit down on his silk hat—a deflating anti-climax.

I am often asked what has been the effect on the House of the introduction of women members. In a sense, it is an embarrassing question because politically, I venture to say, they have not made much difference. Nearly all—Miss Rathbone is a notable exception—have been just as partisan as the average male M.P. A few have grown skilful as Parliamentarians and some speak well enough, but there is still no sign of the woman whose maiden speech will electrify the House as F. E. Smith's did. Yet why not? Perhaps she is on the way. Prejudiced men say that social reforms would have been carried out had women not entered Parliament; the more open-minded acknowledge that women M.P.s have given impetus to reforms.

Again, I am sometimes asked whether the manners of the House have deteriorated. It is an odd question, seeing that political disputants have become almost mealy-mouthed, compared with what they were even half-a-century ago. There has certainly been no deterioration of manners in the House of Commons. Personal rudeness is not more frequent; its comparative rarity makes instances all the more startling. The Labour Party has been guilty occasionally of disorder, but so have the other parties. As a rule none is more decorous at Westminster than the member of humble birth. The House of Commons is still as Gladstone described it—a school of discipline, a school of temper, a school of patience, a school of honour, a school of justice.

The House is as fair-minded as ever it was; just as ready to recognise ability and to frown on pretension. Greater variety of social background has not impeded personal co-operation in the work of Parliament. Men are still judged by personal character; political integrity still counts, so much so that a Maxton may find himself the most popular member of an assembly that in the vast majority disagrees with his politics. Party strife and publicity are boon companions, but personal antipathy rarely takes the stage. It is the pride of Parliament to "disagree only in opinion."

Of course, I must not paint too cherubic a picture of this side of Parliament's character. Ramsay MacDonald said he thought the apparent bad feeling sometimes shown by the two sides in Parliament was "all humbug." That was an exaggeration. It would be a bad thing for our political life if all bitter personal contention were truly humbug. But it is certainly true that friendships do not always follow party lines. Some regard this characteristic as a redeeming feature of British public life. John Bright was of sterner stuff; he believed it difficult for a man to attack in public one with whom he consorted much in private. The difficulty has been got over—for instance, by Churchill and F. E. Smith when they were on different sides.

The top dogs generally behave according to tradition. Disraeli, wearing the flowered waistcoat of his style, said:—"It has long been the boast of the House of Commons that even when political passions run high and party warmth becomes somewhat intense, there should exist between those members of both parties who take any considerable share in the conduct of business, sentiments of courtesy and,

when the public interest requires it, even of confidence." This has been carried out. Only the degree of cordiality varies. Balfour got on better with Harcourt than with Campbell-Bannerman. Asquith preferred other Conservative leaders to Bonar Law. Baldwin and MacDonald filled Disraeli's bill, but Neville Chamberlain was stiffer than Baldwin with the Labour leaders, though when public interest required it, he did not avoid confidential consultation.

Indeed, personal altercations between prominent politicians have been fairly rare in our public life. The most notorious in my time were between Campbell-Bannerman and Joseph Chamberlain. C.-B. said that Chamberlain's publication of private letters in the South African controversy was an act that in private life would exclude a man from honourable society. "I deeply regret," replied Chamberlain, "that I am cut off from the right honourable gentleman's society, which I never enjoyed."

The social side of the House has always tended to relax the strain of political conflict. I doubt if it ever was "the best club in London,"<sup>1</sup> though so up-to-date a member as Miss Ellen Wilkinson has handsomely described it in *The Division Bell Mystery*, as probably the best mixed club in the world. It has many of the amenities of a club and in peace time tea on the Terrace on a summer afternoon with ladies as guests was singularly pleasing. Terrace tea became fashionable at the end of last century, and there was a hubbub in the Lobbies when one member's wife sent a card to her friends: "At home on the Terrace from 5 to 7 p.m." That social pretension was frowned upon. One old-fashioned journal stood abashed before the introduction of waitresses on the Terrace; it feared this might lead to flirtations and scandals!

Increasing provision has been made for the comfort of M.P.s. During an all-night sitting on the Reform Bill of 1831, a member sent home for his razor. The M.P. of to-day can be shaved at the House and he can take a bath there. Talking of shaving reminds me of the almost complete disappearance of beards. I have a framed photograph of Lord Salisbury's first Cabinet. His square beard is conspicuous and nearly all his colleagues had beards or side-whiskers. Snuff has gone out with beards. Churchill still takes a pinch from the box traditionally kept by the principal door-keeper, but there are no addicts now like T. P. O'Connor or the great lawyer Charles Russell who "first his snuff-box opened, then his case."

The M.P. works harder now than in old times. In the early 'eighties he looked in at the House for a few hours, went out to dine, returned in evening dress, and stayed late to cheer his leader and vote. There were, of course, more zealous members, but that was the custom of many a man whose carriage waited in Palace Yard. Now there is much more for everyone to do and his constituency expects the M.P. to take an active and frequent part in the work. He has got to bed earlier, if he wished, since an adjournment hour was fixed in 1888—it was gradually accelerated to 11.30 in 1906—but if the sittings as a rule are shorter the sessions are longer, and in the present century the Commons have not allowed themselves even such a relaxation as they formerly enjoyed when they adjourned over Derby day.

The hour of meeting, 3.45, when I entered the Gallery, was repeatedly changed until settled in normal times on four days a week at 2.45. There has been occasional agitation, specially since the advent of the Labour Party, for the meeting of the House

<sup>1</sup> The phrase was first applied to it in *Friends of Bohemia*, by Edward Michael Whitty, a journalist who wrote a book on St. Stephen's in the 'Fifties.

in the morning, but this was always defeated in peace time by the argument that Ministers would be prevented from attending to their Departments and professional men would be debarred from sitting in Parliament.

Reformers have complained of the time occupied by divisions, but the slow process of voting in the lobby has continued. There has been only a slight restriction of the number of divisions. When an insignificant group of members challenges a division the Speaker may call on them to rise in their places and have their vote taken as they stand, instead of the whole House having to go through the lobby. Till this century every member present during a division was required to take part in it. The refusal of Irish Nationalists in 1901 to comply with that rule led to their being carried out by the police. Now the neutral M.P. may remain in his seat. In the other House Peers who decline to vote take sanctuary on the steps of the throne.

The Standing or Grand Committees, tentatively tried in 1882, revived in 1888 and developed twenty years later, have made an inroad on the M.P.'s time. The work done upstairs in the morning by the conscientious legislator was designed to relieve the pressure on the floor of the House. It was hoped that the institution of two Parliaments in Ireland would give further relief at Westminster. But the burden has increased in the last twenty years. This has been felt by the Ministers. It is true that in old times their only hope of escape from obstructive talk lay in the fatigue of the talkers, and now they are relieved by the closure, the guillotine and the kangaroo, but these devices do not compensate for the load imposed by the expansion of State activities. Ramsay MacDonald envied the leisurely habits of his predecessors. So little leisure have the modern Ministers that they spend less time than Disraeli or Gladstone on the Treasury bench. As a rule they leave after questions and return only at crises in debate. For them and other Parliamentary workers the week-end has been welcome, especially since Friday was substituted, in Balfour's time, for Wednesday, as the early closing sitting.

I have seen an immense development of the part played by questions to Ministers. Sixty years ago twenty or thirty were noted as an extraordinary number. In recent years there have been frequently over one hundred for oral answer with a long list of supplementaries besides those for written reply. Originally the questions were read and some served obstructive purposes by their length. Now a member merely announces the number of his question on the list. Information is ostensibly the main object of questions, but since urgency discussions at the opening of the sitting were restricted they have become a vital method of swift contention. Supplementaries are assumed to arise out of the answer, but often they are framed in advance for a controversial purpose. An Irishman on being informed by the Speaker that his supplementary was not in order said "it distinctly arises out of an answer which the right honourable gentleman has not given."

Is Parliament more talkative? Well, yes. More members desire to speak and more speak fluently. The Victorian squires took little part in debate. Some, like Mr. Speaker Lowther's grandfather, who was fifty years in the House, never addressed it. Even ambitious new members used to pass months without opening their mouths except to ask a question or ejaculate—"Hear, hear!" Nowadays an M.P. will seek to catch the Speaker's eye after less than a week in the House. It is true, however, that debate is not what it used to be. Oratory is less cultivated and

less valued. Yet, the House of Commons can still (as in the Prayer Book debate) rise to a speaking height worthy of its fame; and our history will resound with the speeches Churchill made, especially those in the catastrophic hours when our armament consisted of little else than his oratory. But Churchillian periods are uncommon coinage. It is still true, as Anthony Trollope wrote, that "there are many rocks the young speaker in Parliament should avoid, but no rock requires such careful avoiding as the rock of eloquence." It is even truer than it was. Peroration is out of fashion and prudent moderns avoid it. The swelling period causes a titter. Ornate style is no longer in demand. It is unsuited to the modern questions which have taken the place of constitutional controversy. We are heirs now of Joseph Chamberlain's direct, practical, argumentative manner.

There are some amusing stories of the pompous orator. "Now," said one, "I put this question to myself." And from the depth of the Chair (no less!) there was heard by those near it the murmur, "And a damned silly answer you will get!" That anecdote, I was told, delighted King George V.

Classical quotations have almost gone out. There are fewer scholars in Parliament than there were when Gladstone and Bob Lowe had a duel over the Trojan Horse. Nowadays, if an M.P. ventures on Latin, his fellows unashamedly cry "Translate!" Curzon could recall only two Greek quotations in the House of Commons, one by Asquith, the other by Lord Percy (at the close of last century). Our native immortals, however, are still brought upon the scene. Shakespeare is turned to in every mood and I have heard Bunyan quoted. The more familiar the literary allusion, the more effective. This goes for Dickens. Thackeray is less quoted, but I remember F. E. Smith coming in with *Becky Sharp*. Birrell quoted Johnson. Morley cited Burke. Labour members of the older type appealed to Ruskin. Isaac Foot did not let the House forget Oliver Cromwell. Tennyson has been found very useful by many members who have desired the House and the country to take occasion by the hand and make the bounds of freedom wider yet. Asquith's fastidious taste showed in his quotations. Baldwin ventured out of old pastures into new fields. No party leader in my time has quoted more freely than did Bonar Law, who loved books as well as he loved chess and his pipe. His manner of quotation was conversational; "I think it was so-and-so who wrote" he would say, or "A French writer tells us. . . ." No classic makes a greater appeal than "Alice in Wonderland."

Biblical allusion, so impressively made by John Bright, is very effective in Parliament. No one used it in later times more aptly than Lloyd George. Good phrases, as Justice Shallow said, "are surely and ever were very commendable," but first-class original phrases are rare and seem to be growing rarer. No one equalled Disraeli at that. Catchwords rise, fall and are forgotten. None has lived longer than Asquith's "Wait and see." Sometimes a phrase oddly repeats itself; one used fifty years ago, when Leonard Courtney urged that the Egyptians should be allowed to "stew in their own juice," reappeared in Winston Churchill's speech at the Italian capitulation.

Threadbare, stilted phrases abound. Far, far too many M.P.s "fail to see" or "have yet to learn." "I venture to say" still cloaks what is usually anything but lack of timidity and "I am free to confess" is infrequently followed by candour. "Is't English?" asked and answered Byron, "No, 'tis only Parliamentary." Mixed

metaphors are never let pass. Irishmen have contributed many, but it was a Scot who described a loan to India as "a flea-bite in the ocean." "The pale face of the British soldier" declared the same M.P. "is the backbone of the Indian Army." Another Scot expressed the opinion that "things will never improve in Egypt until the Khedive is able to stand upon his own bottom." Occasional slips of the tongue add to the gaiety of the proceedings. Bright referred to Lord Randolph Churchill, then member for Woodstock, as the member for Woodcock. He declared that that was a slip of the tongue, but colleagues wondered whether it really was.

Read about afterwards, the House sometimes seems to laugh a lot at little. Its humour does not readily transplant from the immediate occasion. Its emotion carries better; reports cast off the dust of years and plainly show a great assembly deeply moved. The quality of debate? It would be better if speeches were shorter. In spite of appeals from the Chair, both front and back bench speeches, as a rule, go on far too long. "Say what you have to say and sit down," said the Duke of Wellington to a new M.P., but sitting down continues the hardest part. Some have stood up so long that they have had to resort to "throat lubrication." Parliament to-day sees less of that aid to eloquence than formerly. I have known members in the past to provide themselves for long speeches with whisky and water, or wine. As a rule, when a Minister needed refreshment it was brought in by his private secretary, the House casting a quizzing glance at what was carried. A gossip in the last generation asserted that one Minister used to conceal a glass of champagne under the table, but how this was managed I could never discover. Nowadays a glass of water is sufficient for most speakers. There is always a decanter of water on the table in the House of Lords.

Let us look in at the House of Lords before we go. Everyone of us at one time or another has jeered at its atmosphere. Disraeli, advising a young peer who desired to qualify as a speaker, told him to go and practise upon tombstones, and Bob Lowe (Lord Sherbrooke) when asked how he liked speaking in the House of Lords replied that it was like talking to an audience of corpses in a charnel house by candle-light. It is true that after the Commons the other House seems chilly and irresponsible. Peers listen to each other on most occasions with polite attention, but the newly ennobled M.P. finds it depressing.

Yet in every generation the House of Lords has produced great orators. There have risen to their feet some of the most eloquent speakers I have ever heard, notably among them Archbishop Magee, and the erudite Duke of Argyll, who held high office in Liberal Governments till he parted from Gladstone—small of stature and proud in mien like a true chieftain. Salisbury and Lansdowne were masters of clear, precise speech; and that the Gilded Chamber, as it was formerly called, can be shaken out of its calm was proved by Rosebery's brilliant sallies and Birkenhead's audacious wit and invective. Stately oratory lasted longer in the House of Lords than in the Commons and is still more appreciated.

The House of Lords, as some far-seeing and hopeful well-wishers predicted when it lost the Veto, is reviving its influence on the nation. Its debates, carried on by eminent men of varied experience, who speak with knowledge and without fear of Whip, are growing more senatorial. Perhaps we are witnessing the slow stages of a characteristic British revolution; perhaps the House of Lords is moving from a backwater of hereditary privilege to wider and more representative service of the State.

One question more! A delicate question! Were our statesmen between the two Great Wars as big as those in former times? When Disraeli left the House of Commons a friend exclaimed "the days of the giants are over," and again in countless eyes it suffered irreparable loss when Gladstone retired. Fortunately in the most terrible emergency in our history we found a giant. But it is of the statesmen of ordinary stature that I think in making a comparison. I think of the men who, although not national leaders, fill high office. Among these the censorious critic—and notably the veteran critic—has seen a decline in power and distinction. Perhaps memory casts a glamour over the past. Or perhaps the critic overlooks the fact that much severer tests have been applied by the problems of recent times to our statesmen than by those in the Victorian and Edwardian days. I leave the question to the independent reader of my reminiscences. They may help him to form an opinion.

I have had pleasure in tracing the evolution of Parliamentary government through sixty years of conflict and change. A record of the impressions of an interested observer could scarcely avoid bias, but I have tried to be fair and accurate as well as candid and I hope if I find patient readers they will share my faith in the House of Commons as a democratic organ and agent. Supercilious people scoff at what they call "your good old-fashioned Parliament." They jeer at the heat and passion of the Ins and Outs and ask what is done by the talking, by the bills and motions and party divisions. Idealists exclaim:—

"How small, of all that human hearts endure,  
That part which laws or kings can cause or cure."

That is true and will always remain true; it is also true that much ill which might have been cured by our laws has not been cured and that far greater and more rapid strides in reform must be made. But my record shows that Parliament has widened the bounds of freedom and improved the lot of the manual worker and the poor, while it has maintained the honour of the kingdom. In short, our Constitution has justified itself in Peace and War.

THE END

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